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MY LITTLE LADY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Thy sinless progress, through a world
By sorrow darken'd and by care disturbed,
Apt likeness bears to hers through gather'd clouds
Moving untouch'd in silver purity.

WORDSWORTH.

MY LITTLE LADY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1871.

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THE LITTLE LADY

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TO

J. C. I.

PART I.

MY LITTLE LADY.

CHAPTER I.

In the Garden.

THERE are certain days in the lives of each one of us, which come in their due course without special warning, to which we look forward with no anticipations of peculiar joy or sorrow, from which beforehand we neither demand nor expect more than the ordinary portion of good and evil, and which yet through some occurrence—unconsidered perhaps at the moment, but gaining in significance with years and connecting events—are destined to live apart in our memories to the end of our existence. Such a day in Horace Graham's life was a certain hot Sunday in August, that he spent at the big hotel at Chaudfontaine.

Every traveller along the great high road leading from Brussels to Cologne knows Chaudfontaine, the little village distant about six miles from Liége, with its church, its big hotel, and its scattered cottages, partly forges, partly restaurants, which shine

white against a dark green background of wooded hills, and gleam reflected in the clear tranquil stream by which they stand. On every side the hills seem to fold over and enclose the quiet green valley; the stream winds and turns, the long poplar-bordered road follows its course; amongst the hills are more valleys, more streams, woods, forests, sheltered nooks, tall grey limestone rocks, spaces of corn-fields, and bright meadows. Everyone admires the charming scenery as the train speeds across it, through one tunnel after another; but there are few amongst our countrymen who care to give it more than a passing glance of admiration, or to tarry in the quiet little village even for an hour, in their great annual rush to Spa, or the Rhine, or Switzerland. As a rule one seldom meets Englishmen at Chaudfontaine, and it was quite by chance that Horace Graham found himself there. An accident to a goods train had caused a detention of several hours all along the line, as he was travelling to Brussels, and it was by the advice of a Belgian fellow-passenger that he had stopped at Chaudfontaine, instead of going on to Liège, as he had at first proposed doing, on hearing from the guard that it was the furthest point that could be reached that night.

Behind the hotel lies a sunshiny shady garden, with benches and tables set under the trees near

the house, and beyond, an unkempt lawn, a sort of wilderness of grass and shrubs and trees, with clumps of dark and light foliage against the more uniform green of the surrounding hills, and it was still cool and pleasant when Graham wandered into it after breakfast on that Sunday morning, whilst all in front of the hotel was already basking in the hot sunshine. He had gone to bed the night before with the fixed intention of leaving by the earliest morning train, for his first impressions of Chaudfontaine had not been cheerful ones. It was nearly midnight when, with his companions, he had crossed the bridge that connects the railway station with the hotel on the opposite side of the stream, and scarcely a light was shining from the windows of the dim white building before him; he was very tired, rather cross, and disposed to grumble at the delay in his journey; and the general aspect of things—the bad supper, the sleepy waiter carrying a candle up flights of broad shallow wooden stairs, and down a long passage to a remote room barely furnished, the uncertain view of a foreground of rustling poplars, and close behind them a black silent mass of hill—all these had not tended to encourage him.

But a man must be very cynical, or very *blasé*, or wholly possessed by some other uncomfortable

quality, who does not feel much cheered and invigorated by morning sunbeams pouring into a strange bed-room, and awakening him to new scenes and unexperienced sensations. Horace Graham was neither cynical nor *blasé*; on the contrary, he was a pleasant-tempered, fresh-hearted lad of twenty or thereabouts, who only three weeks before had made his first acquaintance with French gendarmes, and for the first time had heard children shouting to each other in a foreign tongue along white-walled, sunshiny, foreign streets. Three weeks touring in Germany had only served to arouse in him a passion for travelling and seeing, for new places and peoples and scenes, that in all his life, perhaps, would not be satiated; everything was new to him, everything amused him; and so it happened that, while he was dressing and studying from his window the view that had been only obscurely hinted at in the darkness of the night before, a sudden desire came over him to remain where he was for that day, climb the hills that rose before him, and see what manner of country lay beyond.

It was still early when, after breakfasting by himself in the *salle-à-manger*, he found his way into the garden; no one was stirring, it seemed deserted; he wandered along the gravel paths, trod down the tall grass as he crossed the lawn, and arrived at the

confines of the little domain. On two sides it was bounded by a narrow stream, separating it from the road beyond; at the angle of the garden the shallow, trickling water widened into a little fall crossed by a few planks; there were trees and bushes on each side, and the grassy garden bank sloped down to the stream. It was very green, and peaceful and dewy. Horace stood still for a minute looking at the flickering lights and shadows, and watching the dash and current of the water.

"Fi donc, Mademoiselle, tu n'es pas raisonnable," cries a sweet shrill little voice close to him, *"tu es vraiment insupportable aujourd'hui."*

He turned round and saw a child between five and six years old, dressed in a shabby little merino frock and white pinafore, standing with her back towards him, and holding out a doll at arm's length, its turned-out pink leather toes just touching the ground.

"Veux-tu bien être sage?" continues the small monitress with much severity, *"encore une fois, un, deux, trois!"* and she made a little dancing-step backwards; then with an air of encouragement, *"Allons, mon amie, du courage!"* We must be perfect in our steps for this evening, for you know, Sophie, if you refuse to dance, M. le Prince will be in despair, and M. le Baron will put his hand on his

heart and cry, 'Alas, mademoiselle, you have no pity, and my heart is desolated!'"

"Madelon!" cries a voice through the trees in the distance.

"*Me voici*, papa!" she answered, stopping the dancing-lesson and looking round. As she did so she caught sight of Horace, and gazed up in his face with a child's deliberate stare. She had great brown eyes, a little round fair face, and light hair curling all over her head. She looked up at him quite fearlessly for a moment, and then darted away, dashing against somebody who was coming along the path, and disappeared.

"Take care, *ma petite*; you nearly knocked me down!" cried a good-humoured voice, belonging to a large gentleman with a ruddy face, and black hair and beard. "Ah! good morning, Monsieur," he continued as he approached Horace; "I rejoice to see that you have not yet quitted Chaudfontaine, as you spoke of doing last night."

"I have changed my mind," said Horace, smiling as he recognised his fellow-traveller of the night before. "I think of staying here to-day, and not leaving for Brussels till to-morrow morning."

"You will not regret it," said his companion, as they turned back towards the hotel, and walked on slowly together; "it is true there is not much here

to tempt you during the day; but numbers will arrive for the four o'clock *table-d'hôte*. In the evening there will be quite a little society, and we shall dance. I assure you, monsieur, that we also know how to be gay at Chaudfontaine."

"I don't doubt it," answered Graham; "and though I don't care much about dancing——"

"You don't care about dancing?" interrupted the Belgian with astonishment; "but that is of your nation, Monsieur. You are truly an extraordinary people, you English; you travel, you climb, you ride, you walk, and you do not dance!"

"I think we dance too, sometimes," said the young Englishman, laughing; "but I own that it is walking I care for most just now—the country about here seems to be wonderfully pretty."

"In fact it is not bad," said the Belgian, with the air of paying it a compliment; "and if you take care to return in time for the four o'clock *table-d'hôte*, you cannot do better than make a little promenade to gain an appetite for dinner. I can promise you an excellent one—they keep an admirable cook. I entreat of you not to think of leaving for Brussels; and precisely you cannot go," he added, drawing out his watch, "for it is just the hour that the train leaves, and I hear the whistle at this moment."

And, in fact, though they could not see the train

from where they stood, they heard its shrill whistle as it rushed into the station on the other side of the river.

“So it is decided,” said Graham, “and I remain.”

“And you do wisely, Monsieur,” cried his companion; “believe me, you will not regret passing a day in this charming little spot. Do they speak much in England of Chaudfontaine, Monsieur?”

“Well, no,” Horace was obliged to acknowledge, “they do not.”

“Ah!” said the Belgian, a little disappointed; “but they speak of Brussels, perhaps?”

“Oh! yes, every one knows Brussels,” answered Graham.

“It is a beautiful city,” remarked his companion, “and has a brilliant society; but for my part, I own that at this season of the year I prefer the retirement, the tranquillity of Chaudfontaine, where also one amuses oneself perfectly well. I always spend two or three months here—in fact, have been here for six weeks already this summer. Affairs called me to Aix-la-Chapelle last week for a few days, and that was how I had the good fortune to meet Monsieur last night.”

“It was very lucky for me,” said Horace. “I am delighted to be here. The hotel seems to be

very empty," he added. "I have seen nobody this morning except one little girl."

"But no, the hotel is almost full—people are gone to mass, perhaps, or are in bed, or are breakfasting. It is still early."

"That little girl," said Horace—"does she belong to the house?"

"You mean the little girl who ran against me as I came up to you just now? No, the *propriétaire* of the hotel has but one daughter, Mademoiselle Cécile, a most amiable person. But I know that child—her father is one of the *habitués* of the hotel. She is much to be pitied, poor little one!"

"Why?" asked Graham.

"Because her father—*ah! bon jour, Madame*—excuse me, Monsieur, but I go to pay my respects to Madame la Comtesse!" cried the Belgian, as an elderly red-faced lady, with fuzzy sandy hair, wearing a dingy, many-flounced lilac barége gown, came towards them along the gravel path.

"At last we see you back, my dear Monsieur!" she cried—"ah! how many regrets your absence has caused!—of what an insupportable *ennui* have we not been the victims! But you are looking better than when you left us; your journey has done you good; it is plain that you have not suffered from absence."

“Alas! Madame,” cries the other, “you little know! And how, for my part, can I venture to believe in regrets that have left no traces? Madame is looking more charming, more blooming——”

Horace waited to hear no more; he left the pair standing and complimenting each other on the sunny pathway, and wandered away under the shade of the big trees, crossed the little stream and the white dusty road beyond, and began to ascend the hills.

“What an ugly old woman!” thought the lad. “She and my friend seem to be great allies; she must be at least ten years older than he is, and he talks to her as if she were a pretty girl; but she is a Countess apparently, and I suppose that counts for something. Oh! what a jolly country!”

He strode along whistling, with his hands in his pockets, feeling as if he had the world before him to explore, and in the happiest of moods. Such a mood was not rare with Horace Graham in these youthful days, when, by force of good health, and good spirits, and a large capacity for fresh genuine enjoyment, he was apt to find life pleasant enough on the whole, though for him it lacked several of the things that go to make up the ordinary ideal of human happiness. He was not rich; he had no particular expectations, and but few family ties, for

his parents had both died when he was very young, and except an aunt who had brought him up, and a married sister several years older than himself, he had no near relations in the world. He was simply a medical student, with nothing to look forward to but pushing his own way, and making his own path in life as best he could. But he had plenty of talent, and worked hard at his profession, to which he was devoted for reasons quite unconnected with any considerations of possible profit and loss. Indeed, having just enough money of his own to make him tolerably independent, he was wont to ignore all such considerations in his grand youthful way, and to look upon his profession from a purely abstract scientific point of view. And yet he was not without large hopes, grand vague ambitions concerning his future career; for he was at an age when it seems so much easier to become one of the few enumerated great ones of the world than to remain amongst the nameless forgotten multitudes; and life lay before him rather as something definite, which he could take up and fashion to his own pleasure, than as a succession of days and years which would inevitably mould and influence him in their course. It is not wholly conceit, perhaps, which so assures these clever lads of the vastness of their untried capabilities, that there are moments when they feel as if

they could grasp heaven and earth in their wide consciousness; it is rather a want of experience and clearness of perception. Horace Graham was not particularly conceited, and yet, in common with many other men of his age, he had a conviction that, in some way or other, life had great exceptional prizes in store for him; and indeed he was so strong, and young, and honest-hearted, that he had been successful enough hitherto within his narrow limits. He had pleasant manners, too, and a pleasant face, which gained him as many friends as he ever cared to have; for he had a queer, reserved, unsociable twist in his character, which kept him aloof from much company, and rather spoilt his reputation for geniality and heartiness. He hated the hard work he had to go through in society; so at least he was wont to grumble, and then would add, laughing, "I daresay I am a conceited puppy to say so: but the fact is, there are not six people in the world whose company I would prefer to my own for a whole day."

He found his own company quite sufficient during all his wanderings through that long summer's day in the lovely country round Chaudfontaine, a country neither grand nor wild, hardly romantic, but with a charm of its own that enticed Graham onwards in spite of the hot August sun. It was so

green, so peaceful, so out of the world; the little valleys were wrapped so closely amongst the hills, the streams came gushing out of the limestone rocks, dry water courses led him higher and higher up amongst the silent woods, which stretched away for miles on either hand. Sometimes he would come upon an open space, whence he could look down upon the broader valley beneath, with its quiet river flowing through the midst, reflecting white villages, forges, long rows of poplars, an occasional bridge, and here and there a long low island; or descending, he would find himself in some narrow ravine, cleft between grey rocky heights overgrown with brushwood and trailing plants, the road leading beside a marshy brook, full of rushes and forget-me-nots, and disappearing amongst the forest trees. All day long Graham wandered about that pleasant land, and it was long past the four o'clock dinner hour when he stood on the top of the hill he had seen that morning from his window, and looked across the wide view of woods and cornfields to where a distant cloud of smoke marked the city of Liége. Thence descending by a steep zig-zag path, with a bench at every angle, he crossed the road and the little rivulet, and found himself once more in the garden at the back of the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

In the Salon.

HE had left it in the morning dewy, silent, almost deserted; he found it full of gaiety and life and movement, talking, laughing, and smoking going on, pretty bright dresses glancing amongst the trees, children swinging under the great branches, the flickering lights and shadows dancing on their white frocks and curly heads, white-capped bonnes dangling their *bébés*, papas drinking coffee and liqueurs at the little tables, mammas talking the latest Liège scandal, and discussing the newest Parisian fashions. The table-d'hôte dinner was just over, and everybody had come out to enjoy the air, till it was time for the dancing to begin.

The glass door leading into the passage that ran through the house stood wide open; so did the great hall door at the other end; and Graham could see the courtyard full of sunshine, the iron railing separating it from the road, the river gleaming, the bridge and railway station beyond, and then again the background of hills. He passed through the house, and went out into the courtyard. Here were

more people, more gay dresses, gossip, cigars, and coffee; more benches and tables set in the scanty shade of the formal round-topped trees that stood in square green boxes round the paved quadrangle. Outside in the road, a boy with a monkey stood grinding a melancholy organ; the sun seemed setting to the pretty pathetic tune, which mingled not inharmoniously with the hum of voices and sudden bursts of laughter; the children were jumping and dancing to their lengthening shadows, but with a measured glee, so as not to disturb too seriously the elaborate combination of starch and ribbon and shining plaits which composed their fête day toilettes. A small tottering thing of two years old, emulating its companions of larger growth, toppled over and fell lamenting at Graham's feet as he came out. He picked it up, and set it straight again, and then, to console it, found a *sou*, and showed it how to put it into the monkey's brown skinny hand, till the child screamed with delight instead of woe. The lad had a kind, loving heart, and was tender to all helpless appealing things, and more especially to little children.

He stood watching the pretty glowing scene for a few minutes, and then went in to his solitary *réchauffé* dinner. Coming out again half an hour or so later, he found everything changed. The

monkey boy and his organ were gone, the sun had set, twilight and mists were gathering in the valley, and the courtyard was deserted; but across the grey dusk, light was streaming through the muslin window curtains of the salon, the noise of laughter, and voices, and music came from within now, breaking the evening stillness; for everyone had gone indoors to the salon, where the gas was lighted, chairs and tables pushed out of the way, and Mademoiselle Cécile, the fat good-natured daughter of the *propriétaire*, already seated at the piano. The hall outside fills with grinning waiters and maids, who have their share of the fun as they look in through the open door. Round go the dancers, sliding and twirling on the smooth polished floor, and Mademoiselle Cécile's fingers fly indefatigably over the keys, as she sits nodding her head to the music, and smiling as each familiar face glides past her.

Horace, who, after lingering awhile in the courtyard, had come indoors like the rest of the world, stood apart at the further end of the room, sufficiently entertained with looking on at the scene, which had the charm of novelty to his English eyes, and commenting to himself on the appearance of the dancers.

"But you do wrong not to dance, dear Monsieur, I assure you," said his Belgian friend, coming

up to him at the end of a polka, with the elderly Countess, who with her dingy lilac barége gown exchanged for a dingier lilac silk, and her sandy hair fuzzier than ever, had been dancing vigorously. "Mademoiselle Cécile's music is delicious," he continued, "it positively inspires one; let me persuade you to attempt just one little dance."

"Indeed, I would rather look on," said Horace; "I can listen to Mademoiselle Cécile's music all the same, and I do not care much for dancing, as I told you; besides, I don't know anyone here."

"If that be all," cried the other eagerly, "I can introduce you to half a dozen partners in a moment; that lady that I have just been dancing with, for instance, will be charmed——"

"Stop, I entreat of you," said the young Englishman, in alarm, as his friend was about to rush off; "I cannot indeed—I assure you I am a very bad dancer; I am tired with my long walk too."

"Ah, that walk," said the Belgian, "I did wrong in advising you to take it; you prolonged it till you missed the *table-d'hôte* dinner, and now you are too much fatigued to dance."

"But I am very much amused as it is, I assure you," insisted Graham. "Do tell me something about all these people. Are they all stopping at the hotel?"

His companion was delighted to give any information in his power. No, not a third of the people were stopping at the hotel, the greater part had come over from Liége, and would go back there by the ten o'clock train.

"Then you do not know many of them?" Graham said.

"No," the Belgian admitted, "he did not know many of them; only those who were staying at Chaudfontaine. That lady he had just been dancing with, Monsieur had seen in the morning, he believed; she was the Countess G——, a most distinguished person, with blood-royal in her veins, and came from Brussels. That pretty girl in blue was Mademoiselle Sophie L——, who was going to be married next month to one of the largest proprietors in the neighbourhood, the young man standing by her, who was paying her so much attention. The odd-looking man in shoes and buckles was a rising genius, or thought himself so, a violinist, who came over occasionally from Liége, and hoped to make his fortune some day in London or Paris; and perhaps he will do so," says the Belgian, "for he has talent. That little dirty-looking young man with a hooked nose, and the red Turkish slippers, is a Spaniard going through a course of studies at Liége; he is staying in the hotel, and so are the fat old

gentleman and lady seated on the sofa; they are Brazilians, and he has been sent over by his Government to purchase arms, I believe. Those three young ladies in white are sisters, and are come here from Antwerp for the summer; that is their mother talking to Mademoiselle Cécile. I see no one else at this moment," he added, looking slowly round the room at the groups of dancers who stood chattering and fanning themselves in the interval between the dances.

"Who is that?" asked Graham, directing his attention to a gentleman who had just appeared, and was standing, leaning in the doorway opposite.

He was a tall handsome man, with light hair, and a long fair moustache and beard, perfectly well dressed, and with an air sufficiently distinguished to make him at once conspicuous amongst the Liège clerks and shopkeepers, of whom a large part of the company consisted.

"Ah! precisely, Monsieur, you have fixed upon the most remarkable personage here," cried his companion, with some excitement; "but is it possible you do not know him?"

"I never saw him before," answered Graham. "Is he a celebrity? A prince, or an ambassador, or anything of that kind?"

"No, nothing of that kind," said the other

laughing, "but a celebrity nevertheless in his way. That is M. Linders, the great gambler."

"I never even heard of him," said the young Englishman; "but then I don't know much about such people."

"It is true, I had forgotten that Monsieur is not of this country; but you would hear enough about him were you to stay any time at Wiesbaden, or Homburg, or Spa, or any of those places. He twice broke the bank at Homburg last year, won two hundred thousand francs at Spa this summer, and lost them again the next week. He is a most dangerous fellow, and positively dreaded by the proprietors of the tables."

"What! when he loses two hundred thousand francs?"

"Ah! that is a thing that rarely happens; as a rule he is perfectly cool, which is the principal thing at these tables, plays when the run is in his favour, and stops when it is against him; but occasionally he gets excited, and then of course the chances are that he loses everything like another."

"What can he be doing here?" said Graham.

"Who knows? Stopping a night or two on his way to Paris, or Brussels, perhaps, on the chance of finding some one here rich enough and imprudent

enough to make it worth his while. You do not play, Monsieur?"

"Never in that way," answered the lad, laughing; "I can get through a game of whist decently enough, but I rarely touch cards at all."

"Ah, then you are safe: otherwise I would have said, avoid M. Linders; he has not the best reputation in the world, and he has a brother-in-law who generally travels with him, and is even a greater rogue than himself, but not so lucky—so they say at least."

"Do you know him, this famous gambler? He does not look much like one," said Graham.

"That is true; but he is a man of good birth and education, I believe, though he has turned out such a *mauvais sujet*, and it is part of his *métier* to get himself up in that style. Yes, I know him a little, from meeting him here and elsewhere; he is always going about, sometimes *en prince*, sometimes in a more humble way—but excuse me, dear Monsieur, Mademoiselle Cécile has begun to play, and I am engaged to Mademoiselle Sophie for this dance; she will never forgive me if I make her wait."

The dancers whirled on; the room grew hotter and hotter. M. Linders had disappeared, and Graham began to think that he too had had almost

enough of it all, and that it would be pleasant to seek peace and coolness in the deserted moonlit courtyard. He was watching for a pause in the waltz that would admit of his crossing the room, when his attention was attracted by the same little girl he had seen that morning in the garden. She was still dressed in the shabby old frock and pinafore, and as she came creeping in, threading her way deftly amongst the young ladies in starched muslins and gay ribbons who were fluttering about, she made the effect of a little brown moth who had strayed into the midst of a swarm of brilliant butterflies. No one took any notice of her, and she made her way up to the large round table which had been pushed into the far corner of the room, and near which Graham was standing.

"Do you want anything?" he asked, as he saw her raise herself on tiptoe, and stretch forward over the table.

"I want *that*," she said, pointing to a miniature roulette board, which stood in the middle, beyond the reach of her small arm.

He gave it to her, and then stood watching to see what she would do with it. She set to work with great deliberation; first pulling a handful of sugar-plums out of her pocket, and arranging them in a little heap at her side on the table, and then

proceeding with much gravity to stake them on the numbers. She would put down a bonbon and give the board a twirl; "*vingt-cinq*," she would say; the ball flew round and fell into a number; it might be ten, or twenty, or twenty-five, it did not much matter; she looked to see what it was, but right or wrong, never failed to eat the bonbon—an illogical result, which contrasted quaintly with the intense seriousness with which she made her stakes. Sometimes she would place two or three sugar-plums on one number, always naming it aloud—"trente-et-un," "*douze-premier*," "*douze-après*." It was the oddest game for a small thing not six years old; and there was something odd, too, in her matter-of-fact, business-like air, which amused Graham. He had seen gambling-tables during his three weeks' visit to Germany, and he felt sure that this child must have seen them too.

"Eh! what an insupportable heat!" cried a harsh high-pitched voice behind them. "Monsieur Jules, I will repose myself for a few minutes, if you will have the goodness to fetch me a glass of *eau sucrée*. *Je n'en peux plus!*"

Graham, recognizing the voice, turned round, and saw the Countess G—— leaning on the arm of a young man with whom she had been dancing.

"But it is really stifling!" she exclaimed, drop-

ping into an arm-chair by the table as her partner retired. "Monsieur does not dance, apparently," she continued, addressing Horace. "Well, you are perhaps right; it is a delightful amusement, but on a night like this——Ah! here is little Madelon. I have not seen you before to-day. How is it you are not dancing?"

"I don't want to," answered the child, giving the roulette-board a twirl.

"But that is not at all a pretty game that you have there," said the Countess, shaking her head; "it was not for little girls that Mademoiselle Cécile placed the roulette-board there. Where is your doll? why are you not playing with her?"

"My doll is in bed; and I like this best," answered the child indifferently. "*Encore ce malheureux trente-six! Je n'ai pas de chance ce soir!*"

"But little girls should not like what is naughty: and I think it would be much better if you were in bed too. Come, give me that ugly toy; there is Monsieur quite shocked to see you playing with it."

Madelon looked up into Horace's face with her wide-open gaze, as if to verify this wonderful assertion; and apparently satisfied that it had been made for the sake of effect, continued her game without making any reply.

"Oh, then, I really must take it away," said the

Countess; "*allons*, be reasonable, *ma petite*; let me have that, and go and dance with the other little boys and girls."

"But I don't want to dance, and I like to play at this," cries Madelon with her shrill little voice, clutching the board with both her small hands, as the Countess tried to get possession of it; "you have no right to take it away. Papa lets me play with it; and I don't care for you! Give it me back again, I say; *je le veux, je le veux!*"

"No, no," answered the Countess, pushing it beyond Madelon's reach to the other side of the table. "I daresay you have seen your papa play at that game; but children must not always do the same as their papas. Now, be good, and eat your bonbons like a sensible child."

"I will not eat them if I may not play for them!" cried the child; and with one sweep of her hand she sent them all off the table on to the floor, and stamped on them again and again with her tiny foot. "You have no right to speak to me so!" she went on energetically; "no one but my papa speaks to me; and I don't know you, and I don't like you, and you are very ugly!" and then she turned her back on the Countess and stood in dignified silence.

"*Mais c'est un petit diable!*" cried the astonished lady, fanning herself vigorously with her pocket-

handkerchief. She was discomfited though she had won the victory, and hailed the return of her partner with the *eau sucrée* as a relief. "A thousand thanks, M. Jules! What if we take another turn, though this room really is of an insufferable heat."

Madelon was left confronting Horace, a most ill-used little girl, not crying, but with flushed cheeks and pouting lips—a little girl who had lost her game and her bonbons, and felt at war with all the world in consequence. Horace was sorry for her; he, too, thought she had been ill-used, and no sooner was the Countess fairly off than he said, very immorally, no doubt,

"Would you like to have your game back again?"

"No," said Madelon, in whom this speech roused a fresh sense of injury; "I have no more bonbons."

Graham had none to offer her, and a silence ensued, during which she stood leaning against the table, slowly scraping one foot backwards and forwards over the remains of the scattered bonbons. At last he bethought him of a small bunch of charms that he had got somewhere, and hung to his watch-chain, and with which he had often enticed and won the hearts of children.

"Would you like to come and look at these?" he said, holding them up.

"No," she replied, ungraciously, and retreating a step backwards.

"Not at this?" he said. "Here is a little steam engine that runs on wheels; and, see, here is a fan that will open and shut."

"No," she said again, with a determined little shake of her head, and still retreating.

"But only look at this," he said, selecting a little flexible enamel fish, and trying to lure back this small wild bird. "See this little gold and green fish, it moves its head and tail."

"No," she said once more, but the fish was evidently a temptation, and she paused irresolute for a moment; but Graham made a step forward, and this decided her.

"I don't care for *bréloques*," she said, with disdain, "and I don't want to see them, I tell you." And then, turning round, she marched straight out of the room.

At that moment the music stopped, the waltzing ceased, and a line of retreat was left open for Graham. He saw the Countess once more approaching, and availed himself of it; out of the noise and heat and crowd he fled, into the fresh open air of the quiet courtyard.

CHAPTER III.

In the Courtyard.

THREE gentlemen with cigars, sitting on the bench under the salon windows, two more pacing up and down in the moonlight before the hall-door, and a sixth apparently asleep in a shadowy corner, were the only occupants of the courtyard. Graham passed them by, and sought solitude at the lower end, where he found a seat on the stone coping of the iron railing. The peace and coolness and silence were refreshing, after the heat and clamour of the salon; the broad harvest-moon had risen above the opposite ridge of hills, and flooded everything with clear light, the river gleamed and sparkled, the poplars threw long still shadows across the white road; now and then the leaves rustled faintly, some far-off voice echoed back from the hills, and presently from the hotel the sound of the music, and the measured beat of feet, came softened to the ear, mingled with the low rush of the stream, and the ceaseless ringing of the hammers in the village forges.

Horace had not sat there above ten minutes,

and was debating whether—his Belgian friend notwithstanding—a stroll along the river-bank would not be a pleasanter termination to his evening than a return to the dancing, when he saw a small figure appear in the hall doorway, stand a moment as if irresolute, and then come slowly across the courtyard towards him. As she came near he recognised little Madelon. She paused when she was within a yard or two of him, and stood contemplating him with her hands clasped behind her back.

“So you have come out too,” he said.

“*Mais oui—tout ce tapage m’agace les nerfs,*” answered the child, pushing her hair off her forehead with one of her old-fashioned little gestures, and then standing motionless as before, her hands behind her, and her eyes fixed on Graham. Somehow he felt strangely attracted by this odd little child, with her quaint vehement ways and speeches, who stood gazing at him with a look half *farouche*, half confiding, in her great brown eyes.

“Monsieur,” she began, at last.

“Well,” said Graham.

“Monsieur, I *would* like to see the little green fish. May I look at it?”

“To be sure,” he answered. “Come here, and I will show it to you.”

“And, Monsieur, I do like *breloques* very much,” continues Madelon, feeling that this is a moment for confession.

“Very well, then, you can look at all these. See, here is the little fish to begin with.”

“And may I have it in my own hand to look at?” she asked, willing to come to some terms before capitulating.

“Yes, you shall have it to hold in your own hand, if you will come here.”

She came close to him then, unclasping her hands, and holding out a tiny palm to receive the little trinket.

Horace was engaged in unfastening it from the rest of the bunch, and whilst doing so he said,

“Will you not tell me your name? Madelon, is it not?”

“My name is Madeleine, but papa and every one call me Madelon.”

“Madeleine what?”

“Madeleine Linders.”

“Linders!” cried Horace, suddenly enlightened; “what, is M. Linders—” the famous gambler he had nearly said, but checked himself—“is that tall gentleman with a beard, whom I saw in the salon just now, your papa?”

“Yes, that is my papa. Please may I have that now?”

He put the little flexible toy into her hand, and she stood gazing at it for a moment, almost afraid to touch it, and then pushing it gently backwards and forwards with one finger.

“It does move!” she cried delighted. “I never saw one like it before.”

“Would you like to keep it?” asked Graham.

“Always, do you mean?—for my very own?”

“Yes, always.”

“Ah, yes!” she cried, “I should like it very much. I will wear it round my neck with a string, and love it so much,—better than Sophie.”

She looked at it with great admiration as it glittered in the moonlight; but her next question fairly took Horace aback.

“Is it worth a great deal of money, Monsieur?” she inquired.

“Why, no, not a great deal—very little, in fact,” he replied.

“Ah! then, I will beg papa to let me keep it always, always, and not to take it away.”

“I daresay he will let you keep it, if you tell him you like it,” said Graham, not clearly understanding her meaning.

“Oh! yes, but then he often gives me 'pretty

things, and then sometimes he says he must take them away again, because they are worth so much money. I don't mind, you know, if he wants them; but I will ask him to let me keep this."

"And what becomes of all your pretty things?"

"I don't know; I have none now," she answered, "we left them behind at Spa. Do you know one reason why I would not dance to-night?" she added, lowering her voice confidentially.

"No; what was it?"

"Because I had not my blue silk frock with lace, that I wear at the balls at Wiesbaden and Spa. I can dance, you know, papa taught me; but not in this old frock, and I left my other at Spa."

"And what were your other reasons?" asked Graham, wondering more and more at the small specimen of humanity before him.

"Oh! because the room here is so small and crowded. At Wiesbaden there are rooms large—so large—quite like this courtyard," extending her small arms by way of giving expression to her vague sense of grandeur; "and looking-glasses all round, and crimson sofas, and gold chandeliers, and ladies in such beautiful dresses, and officers who danced with me. I don't know any one here."

"And who were the Count and the Prince you were talking about to Mademoiselle Sophie in the garden this morning?"

Madelon looked disconcerted.

"I shan't tell you," she said, hanging down her head.

"Will you not? Not if I want to know very much?"

She hesitated a moment, and then burst forth—

"Well, then, they were just nobody at all. I was only talking make-believe to Sophie, that she might do the steps properly."

"Oh! then, you did not expect to see them here this evening?"

"Here!" cries Madelon, with much contempt; "why, no. One meets nothing but *bourgeois* here."

Graham was infinitely amused.

"Am I a *bourgeois*?" he said, laughing.

"I don't know," she replied, looking at him; "but you are not a milord, I know, for I heard papa asking Mademoiselle Cécile about you, and she said you were not a milord at all."

"So you care for nothing but Counts and Princes?"

"I don't know," she said again. Then with an evident sense that such abstract propositions would involve her beyond her depth, she added, "Have

you any other pretty things to show me? I should like to see what else you have on your chain."

In five minutes more they were fast friends, and Madelon, seated on Graham's knee, was chattering away, and recounting to him all the history of her short life. He was not long in perceiving that her father was the beginning and end of all her ideas—her one standard of perfection, the one medium through which, small as she was, she was learning to look out on and estimate the world, and receiving her first impressions of life. She had no mother, she said, in answer to Graham's inquiries. *Maman* had died when she was quite a little baby; and though she seemed to have some dim faint recollection of having once lived in a cottage in the country, with a woman to take care of her, everything else referred to her father, from her first, vague floating memories to the time when she could date them as distinct and well-defined, facts. She had once had a nurse, she said,—a long time ago that was, when she was little—but papa did not like her, and so she went away; and now she was too big for one. Papa did everything for her, it appeared, from putting her to sleep at night, when *Maiselle* was disposed to be wakeful, to nursing her when she was ill, taking her to fêtes on grand holidays, buying her pretty things, walking with her,

teaching her dancing, and singing, and reading; and she loved him so much—ah! so much! Indeed, in all the world, the child had but one object for a child's boundless powers of trust and love and veneration, and that one was her father.

“And where do you generally live now?” asked Graham.

“Why, nowhere in particular,” Madelon answered. “Of course not—they were always travelling about. Papa had to go to a great many places. They had come last from Spa, and before that they had been at Wiesbaden and Homburg, and last winter they had spent at Nice: and now they were on their way to Paris.”

“And do you and your papa always live alone? Have you not an uncle?” enquired Graham, remembering the Belgian's speech about the brother-in-law.

“Oh! yes, there is Uncle Charles—he comes with us generally; but sometimes he goes away, and then I am so glad.”

“How is that? are you not fond of him?”

“No,” said Madelon, “I don't like him at all; he is very disagreeable, and teases me. And he is always wanting me to go away; he says, ‘Adolphe’—that is papa, you know—‘when is that child going to school?’ But papa pays no attention to him, for

he is never going to send me away; he told me so, and he says he could not get on without me at all."

Graham no longer wondered at Madelon's choice of a game, for it appeared she was in the habit of accompanying her father every evening to the gambling tables, when they were at any of the watering-places he frequented.

"Sometimes we go away into the ball-room and dance," she said, "that is when papa is losing; he says, 'Madelon, *mon enfant*, I see we shall do nothing here to-night, let us go and dance.' But sometimes he does nothing but win, and then we stop till the table closes, and he makes a great deal of money. Do you ever make money in that way, Monsieur?" she added naïvely.

"Indeed I do not," replied Graham.

"It is true that everyone has not the same way," said the child, with an air of being well informed, and evidently regarding her father's way as a profession like another, only superior to most. "What do you do, Monsieur?"

"I am going to be a doctor, Madelon."

"A doctor," she said reflecting; "I do not think that can be a good way. I only know one doctor, who cured me when I was ill last winter; but I know a great many gentlemen who make money

like papa. Can you make a fortune with ten francs, Monsieur?"

"I don't think I ever tried," answered Horace.

"Ah well, papa can; I have often heard him say, 'Give me only ten francs, *et je ferai fortune!*'"

There was something at once so droll and so sad about this child, with her precocious knowledge and ignorant simplicity, that the lad's honest tender heart was touched with a sudden pity as he listened to her artless chatter. He was almost glad when her confidences drifted away to more childlike subjects of interest, and she told him about her toys, and books, and pictures, and songs; she could sing a great many songs, she said, but Horace could not persuade her to let him hear one.

"Why do you talk French?" she said presently; "you speak it so funnily. I can talk English."

"Can you?" said Horace laughing, for indeed he spoke French with a fine English accent and idiom. "Let me hear you. Where did you learn it?"

"Uncle Charles taught me; he is English," she answered, speaking correctly enough, with a pretty little accent.

"Indeed!" cried Graham. "Your mother was English, then?"

"Yes. Mamma came from England, papa says, and Uncle Charles almost always talks English to me. I would not let him do it, only papa wished me to learn."

"And have you any other relations in England?"

"I don't know," she answered. "We have never been in England, and papa says he will never go, for he detests the English; but I only know Uncle Charles and you, and I like you."

"What is your Uncle Charles' other name? Can you tell me?"

"Leroy," she answered promptly.

"But that is not an English name," said Graham.

This was a little beyond Madelon, but after some consideration, she said with much simplicity,

"I don't know whether it is not English. But it is only lately his name has been Leroy, since he came back from a journey he made; before that it was something else, I forget what, but I heard him tell papa he would like to be called Leroy, as it was a common name; and papa told me, in case anyone asked me."

"I understand," said Graham; and indeed he did understand, and felt a growing compassion for

the poor little girl, whose only companions and protectors were a gambler and a sharper.

They were still talking, when the silence of the courtyard was broken by a sudden confusion and bustle. The sound of the music and dancing had already ceased; and now a medley of voices, a shrill clamour of talking and calling, made themselves heard through the open hall door.

“Henri! Henri! ou est-il donc, ce petit drôle?”

“Allons; Pauline, dépêche toi, mon enfant, ton père nous attends!”

“Ciel! j’ai perdu mon fichu et mes gants.”

“Enfin.”

“The people are going away,” says Madelon; and, in fact, in another minute the whole party, talking, laughing, hurrying, came streaming out by twos and threes into the moonlight, and, crossing the road and bridge, disappeared one by one in the station beyond, the sound of their voices still echoing back through the quiet night. The last had hardly vanished when a tall solitary figure appeared in the courtyard, and advanced, looking round as if searching for some one.

“Madelon!” cried the same voice that Graham had heard that morning in the garden.

“There is papa looking for me; I must go,” exclaimed the child at the same moment; and before

Graham had time to speak, she had slipped off his knee and darted up to her father; then taking his hand, the two went off together, the small figure jumping and dancing by the side of the tall man as they disappeared within the doorway of the hotel.

A few minutes more, and then a sound as of distant thunder told that the train was approaching through the tunnel. Graham watched it emerge, traverse the clear moonlit valley with slackening speed, and pause at the station for its freight of passengers. There was a vague sound of confusion as the people took their places, and then with a parting shriek it set off again; and as the sound died away in the distance, a great stillness succeeded the noise and bustle of a few moments before.

Horace was afraid he had seen the last of Madelon, for returning to the hotel he found no one in the salon, with the exception of Mademoiselle Cécile, who was already putting out the lights. The hall, too, was deserted; the servants had vanished, and the *habitués* of the hotel had apparently gone to bed, for he met no one as he passed along, and turned down the passage leading to the *salle-à-manger*. This was a large long room, occupying the whole ground floor of one wing of the hotel,

with windows looking out on one side into the courtyard, on the other into the garden, two long tables, smaller ones in the space between, and above them a row of chandeliers smothered in pink and yellow paper roses. The room looked bare and deserted enough now; a sleepy waiter lounged at the further end, the trees in the garden rustled and waved to and fro in the rising night breeze, the moonlight streamed through the uncurtained windows on to the boarded floor and white table-cloths, chasing the darkness into remote corners, and contending with the light of the single lamp which stood on one of the smaller tables, where two men were sitting, drinking, smoking, and playing at cards.

One of them was a man between thirty and forty, in a tight-fitting black coat buttoned up to his chin, and with a thin face, smooth shaven, with the exception of a little yellow moustache, and sharp grey eyes. He would have been handsome, had it not been for his unpleasant expression, at once knowing and suspicious. The other Horace immediately recognised as Monsieur Linders; and a moment afterwards he perceived little Madeleine, sitting nestled close up to her father's side. The lamp-light shone on her curly head and innocent *mignonne* face as she watched the game with eager eyes; it was piquant, and she was marking for her father, and

when he had a higher score than his opponent, she laughed and clapped her hands with delight.

Graham stood watching this little scene for a minute; and somehow, as he looked at the little motherless girl, there came the thought of small rosy children he knew far away in England, who, having said their prayers, and repeated their Sunday hymns, perhaps, had been tucked into little white beds, and been fast asleep hours ago; and a kind, foolish notion entered the young fellow's head, that, for that one evening at least, he must get the brown-eyed child, who had taken his fancy so much, away from the drinking, and smoking, and card-playing, into a purer atmosphere. He went up to the table, and leant over her chair.

"Will you come out again and have a walk with me in the garden?" he said in English.

The man opposite, who was dealing, looked up sharply and suspiciously. Madelon turned round, and gazed up into the kind face smiling down on her, then shook her head with great decision.

"Not a little walk? I will tell you such pretty stories, all about fairies, and moonlight, and little boys and girls, and dragons," said Horace, drawing largely on his imagination, in his desire to offer a sufficient inducement.

"No," said Madelon, "I can't come; I am marking for papa."

"What is it?" said M. Linders, who understood very little English; "what does this gentleman want, *mon enfant?*"

"I was asking your little girl if she would take a walk with me in the garden," says Horace, getting rather red, and in his bad French.

"Monsieur is too good," answers M. Linders, making a grand bow, whilst his companion, having finished dealing, sat puffing away at his cigar, and drumming impatiently with his fingers on the table; "but the hour is rather late; what do you say, Madelon? Will you go with Monsieur?"

"No, papa," says the child, "I am marking for you; I don't want to go away."

"You see how it is, Monsieur," said M. Linders, turning to Graham with a smile and a shrug. "This little one thinks herself of so much importance, that she will not leave me."

"Are you then mad," cried his companion, "that you think of letting Madelon go out at this time of night? It is nearly eleven o'clock, and she can hardly keep her eyes open."

"My eyes are wide, wide open, Uncle Charles," exclaimed Madelon, indignantly; "I'm not a bit tired, but I don't want to go out now."

"Monsieur will perhaps join our party," said Monsieur Linders, very politely. "I should be delighted to try my luck with a fresh adversary."

"Thank you," said Graham, "but I hardly ever touch cards." Then turning to Madelon, he added, "I must go away now, since you will not come for a walk. Won't you wish me good-bye? I shall not be here to-morrow."

She turned round and put her little hand into his for a moment; then with a sudden shy caprice snatched it away, and hid her face on her father's shoulder, just peeping at him with her bright eyes. But she started up again suddenly as he was leaving the room, calling out "*Adieu, Monsieur, bon voyage,*" and kissing her hand to him. He smiled and nodded in return, bowed to M. Linders, and so went away. There was a moment's silence after he went, and then, "You have made a fine acquaintance this evening, Madelon," said her uncle.

Madelon made a little *moue*, but did not answer.

"Are you then mad, Adolphe," he said again, "that you permit Madeleine to pick up an acquaintance with anyone who chooses to speak to her? An Englishman too!"

"Papa is not mad," cried Madelon, between whom and her uncle there was apparently a standing skirmish. "He was a very kind gentleman, and

I like him very much; he gave me this little gold-fish, and I shall keep it always, always," and she kissed it with effusion.

"Bah!" said M. Linders, "English or French, it is all one to me; and what harm could he do to the little one? It was an accident, but it does not matter for once. Come, Madelon, you have forgotten to mark."

"It is your turn to deal next, papa," said the child, "may I do it for you?"

Horace Graham left Chaudfontaine by the earliest train the following morning; and of all the people he had seen on that Sunday evening at the hotel, only two ever crossed his path again in after years—M. Linders, and his little daughter, Madeleine.

CHAPTER IV.

Retrospect.

M. LINDERS was of both Belgian and French extraction, his father having been a native of Liége, his mother a Parisian of good family, who, in a moment of misplaced sentiment, as she was wont in after years to sigh, had consented to marry a handsome young Belgian officer, and had expiated her folly by spending the greater part of her married life at Malines, where her husband was stationed, and at Liége, where his mother and sister resided. Adolphe's education, however, was wholly French; for Madame Linders, who, during her husband's life, had not ceased to mourn over her exile from her own city, lost no time, after his death, in returning to Paris with her two children, Thérèse, a girl of about twelve, and Adolphe, then a child five or six years old.

Madame Linders had money, but not much, and she made it go further than did ever Frenchwoman before, which is saying a great deal. Adolphe must be educated, Adolphe must be clothed, Adolphe was to be a great man some day; he was to go into

the army, make himself a name, become a General, a Marshal,—heaven knows what glories the mother did not dream for him, as she turned and twisted her old black silks, in the *entresol* in the Chaussée d'Antin, where she had her little apartment. She had friends in Paris, and must keep up appearances for Adolphe's sake, not to mention her own, and so could not possibly live in a cheap out-of-the-way quarter.

As for Thérèse, she was of infinitely small account in the family. She was plain, not too amiable, nor particularly clever, and inclined to be *dévoté*; and, as in spite of positive and negative failings, she also had to eat and be clothed as well as her handsome fair brother, she could be regarded as nothing else than a burden in the economical household.

“You ask me what I shall do with Thérèse?” said Madame Linders one day to a confidential friend. “Oh! she will go into a convent, of course. I know of an excellent one near Liége, of which her aunt is the superior, and where she will be perfectly happy. She has a turn that way. What else can I do with her, my dear? To speak frankly, she is *laide à faire peur*, and she can have no *dot* worth mentioning, for I have not a sou to spare; so there is no chance of her marrying.”

Thérèse knew her fate, and was resigned to it. As her mother said, she had a turn that way; and to the Liége convent she accordingly went, but not before Madame Linders' death, which took place when her daughter was about seven-and-twenty, and which was, as Thérèse vehemently averred, occasioned by grief at her son's conduct.

Adolphe had also known the fate reserved for him, and was by no means resigned to it; for he had never had the least intention of becoming a soldier, and having escaped conscription, absolutely refused to enter the army. He was a clever, unprincipled lad, who had done well at his studies, but lost no time in getting into the most dissipated society he could find from the moment he left college. He inherited his father's good looks, but his mother's predilections apparently; for he set out in life with the determination to be Parisian amongst Parisians—of a certain class, be it understood; and having some talent for drawing, as indeed he had for most things, he used it as a pretext, announced that he intended to be an artist, and furnishing a room in the Quartier Latin, with an easel and a pipe, he began the wild Bohemian life which he found most in accordance with his tastes.

He was selfish and reckless enough, but not altogether heartless, for he had a real affection for his

mother, which might have been worked upon with advantage. But Madame Linders, who had indulged him till he had learnt to look upon her devotion as a thing of course, now turned upon him with the fretful, inconsequent reproaches of a weak mind; and finding that he was constantly met with tearful words and aggrieved looks, her son avoided her as much as possible. His sister he could not endure. Thérèse had always been jealous of the marked preference shown for him; and now, with an evident sense of triumph, she preached little sermons, talked at him with unceasing perseverance, and in truth was not a very engaging person.

Madame Linders had not been dead ten days, when the brother and sister had a violent quarrel, and parted with the determination on either side never to meet again—a resolution which was perfectly well kept. Thérèse retired to the Belgian convent, and Adolphe, the possessor of a few thousand francs, the remains of his mother's small fortune, returned to his studio and to the life he had chosen.

The success and duration of a career of this sort is in exact proportion to the amount of capital, real or assumed, invested in it. Monsieur Linders' capital was very small; his francs and credit both were soon exhausted, and he began to find that making-

believe to paint pictures was hardly a paying business. He tried to take portraits, attempted etching, gambled, and, finally, being more in debt than he could well afford, disappeared from the Paris world for a number of years, and for a long space was known and heard of no more. It was indeed affirmed in his circle of acquaintance that he had been seen playing a fiddle at one of the cheap theatres; that he had been recognized in the dress of a fiacre-driver, and in that of a waiter at a Café Chantant: but these reports were idly spread, and wanted confirmation. They might or might not have been true. M. Linders never cared to talk much of those seven or eight years in which he had effaced himself, as it were, from society; but it may be imagined that he went through some strange experiences in a life which was a struggle for bare existence. Respectable ways of gaining a livelihood he ever held in aversion; and it was not, therefore, to be expected that a foolish and unprofitable pride would interfere to prevent his using any means not absolutely criminal in order to reach any desired end.

At length, however, he emerged from obscurity, and rose once more to the surface of society; and one of his old acquaintance, who encountered him at Homburg, returned marvelling to Paris to relate that he had seen Adolphe Linders winning fabulous

sums at *trente-et-quarante*, that he was decently clothed, had a magnificent suite of apartments at one of the first hotels, and an English wife of wondrous beauty. Monsieur Linders had, in fact, sown his wild oats, so to speak, and settled down to the business of his life. In former days, gambling had been a passion with him—too much so, indeed, to admit of his playing with any great success; he had been apt to lose both temper and skill. Time, however, while increasing this passion for play, till it gradually became a necessity of his life, had taught him to bring to bear upon it all the ability which would have eminently fitted him for some more praiseworthy employment. Formerly he had indulged in it as a diversion; now it became a serious business, which he prosecuted with a cool head, determined will, and unfailing perseverance—qualities for which few would have given him credit in the wild unsettled period of his early career. The result was highly satisfactory to himself; he was soon known as one of the most successful haunters of the German and Belgian gaming-tables; he cast off the outward aspect and manners of the Bohemian set he had once affected, and assumed the guise and dress of the gentleman he really was—at least by birth and education—and which he found at once more profitable and more congenial to his ma-

turer tastes. He lived splendidly, and spent money freely when he had it; incurred debts with great facility when he had not—debts which he did or did not pay, as the case might be.

It was during a winter spent in Brussels that he made the acquaintance of Charles Moore, a young Englishman with tastes identical with his own, but inferior to him in ability, talents, and even in principles. A sort of partnership was formed between them, Mr. Linders undertaking most of the work, and the Englishman contributing his small fortune as capital; and not only his own, but that of his sister Magdalen, a young girl who had come abroad with her brother, the only near relation she had in the world. M. Linders had been introduced to her, and she, in complete ignorance of the real character of either him or her brother Charles, had, with all the simplicity of eighteen, straightway fallen in love with the handsome gentlemanlike man, who, on his side, made no secret of the impression produced on him by the great loveliness of the English girl. Moore, who was a thoroughly heartless scamp, had not the least compunction in agreeing to a marriage between his sister and this man, with whose character and mode of life he was perfectly well acquainted; indeed, it suited his views so well, that he did what lay in his power to forward it. There

were no difficulties in the way; the two were almost alone in the world. He had been left her sole guardian by their old father, who had died a twelve-month before; and she, trusting her brother entirely, was glad to leave everything in his hands. The marriage was accomplished with all possible speed, and it was not till nearly two months later that an accident revealed to Magdalen Linders, what indeed in any case she must have discovered before long—what manner of man this was she had got for her husband.

Then she did not pine away, nor sicken with despair, being of a great courage, strong to bear evil and misfortune, and not made of the stuff that gives way under cruel deception and disappointment. She uttered only one reproach—

“You should have told me of all this, Adolphe,” she said.

“You would not have married me,” he answered gloomily.

“I—I do not know. Ah, I loved you so much, and so truly!”

And she did love him still; and clung to him to the last, but not the less was she broken-hearted, so far as any enjoyment of life was concerned; and her husband saw it. All sense of rejoicing seemed to die out of her heart for ever. She hated the

splendour with which he sometimes surrounded her, even more than the paltry shifts and expedients to which at other times they had to resort, when he had spent all his money, and there was no more forthcoming for the moment; she wept when her children were born, thinking of the iniquity of the world they had entered; and when her two little boys died one after the other, there was almost a sense of relief mixed with the bitterness of her sorrow, as she reflected on the father she could not have taught them to respect, and on the abject evil and misery from which she could not have shielded them.

As for M. Linders, he at once adored and neglected his wife, as was the nature of the man; that is, he adored her theoretically for her rare beauty, but neglected her practically, when, after a few months of married life, he saw her bloom fading, and her animation vanish, in the utter despondency which had seized her, and which found its outward expression in a certain studied composure and coldness of manner. There soon came a time when he would have willingly freed himself altogether from the constraint of her presence. He travelled almost incessantly, spending the summer and autumn at the German watering-places; the winter in France, or Belgium, or Italy; and he would

sometimes propose that she should remain at a Paris hotel till he could return to her. In the first years after their marriage she objected vehemently. She was so young, so unused to solitude, that she felt a certain terror at the prospect of being left alone; and, moreover, she still clung with a sort of desperation to her girlish illusions, and, loving her husband, could not cease to believe in his love for her. She had plans, too, for reforming him, and for a long time would not allow herself to be convinced of their utter vanity and hopelessness. After the death of her little boys, however, she became more indifferent, or more resigned. And so it came to pass that when she had been married about six years, and four months after her third child was born, Madame Linders died, alone at a Paris hotel, with no one near her but the doctor, her baby's nurse, and the woman of the house. She had dictated a few words to tell her husband, who was then in Germany, that she was dying; and, stricken with a horrible remorse, he had travelled with all possible haste to Paris, and arrived at daybreak one morning to find that his wife had died the evening before.

Madame Linders' death had been caused by a fever, under which she had sunk rapidly at last. There had been no question of heart-breaking or pining grief here—so her husband thought with a

sort of satisfaction even then, as he remembered his sister's words of bitter reproach over their mother's death-bed; and yet not the less, as he looked at his dead wife's face, did the reflection force itself upon him, that he had made the misery instead of the happiness of her life. He was a man who had accustomed himself to view things from the hardest and most practical point of view; and from such a view his marriage had been rather a failure than otherwise, since the memory of the little fortune she had brought with her had vanished with the fortune itself. But it had not been altogether for money that he had married her; he had been in love with her at one time, and that time repeated itself, with a pertinacity not to be shaken off, as he stood now in her silent presence.

Whatever his feelings may have been, however, they found no expression then. He turned sharply on the women standing round, who had already, after the fashion of womankind, contrived, without speaking, to let him know their opinion of a man who had left his wife alone for six months at an hotel, whilst he went and amused himself. He scarcely glanced at the small daughter, now presented to him for the first time; and he bade Madame Lavaux, the mistress of the hotel, "make haste and finish with all that," when, with tearful voice, and

discursive minuteness, she related to him the history of his wife's last days. He made all necessary arrangements; took possession of Madame Linders' watch and few trinkets; himself superintended the packing of her clothes and other trifling properties into a large trunk, which he left in Madame Lavaux' charge; attended the funeral on the following day; and immediately on his return from it, ordered a fiacre to be in readiness to convey him to the railway station, as he was going to quit Paris immediately. He was on the point of departure, when he was confronted by Madame Lavaux and the nurse bearing the infant, who begged to know if he had any directions to leave concerning his child.

"Madame," he answered, addressing the landlady, "I entrust all these matters to you; see that the child is properly provided for, and I will send the requisite money."

"We had arranged that her nurse should take her away to her own home in the country," said Madame Lavaux.

"That will do," he answered; and was about to leave the room, when the nurse, an honest countrywoman, interposed once more, to inquire where she should write to Monsieur to give him tidings of his little daughter.

"I want none," he replied. "You can apply

here to Madame for money if the child lives; if it dies she will let me know, and I need send no more." And so saying, he strode out of the room, leaving the women with hands and eyes uplifted at the hard-hearted conduct of the father.

For nearly two years M. Linders was absent from Paris, wandering about, as his habit was, from one town to another, a free man, as he would himself have expressed it, except for the one tie which he acknowledged only in the sums of money he sent from time to time, with sufficient liberality, to Madame Lavaux. No news reached him of his child, and he demanded none. But about twenty months after his wife's death, business obliged him to go for a few weeks to Paris; and finding himself with a leisure day on his hands, it occurred to him, with a sudden impulse, to spend it in the country and go and see his little girl. He ascertained from Madame Lavaux where she was, and went.

The woman with whom little Madeleine had been placed lived about fifteen miles from Paris, in a small village perched half-way up a steep hill, from the foot of which stretched a wide plain, where the Seine wound slowly amongst trees and meadows, and scattered villages. The house to which M. Linders was directed stood a little apart from the others, near the road-side, but separated

from it by a strip of garden, planted with herbs and a patch of vines; and as he opened the gate, he came at once upon a pretty little picture of a child of two years, in a quaint, short-waisted, long-skirted pinafore, toddling about, playing at hide-and-seek among the tall poles and trailing tendrils, and kept within safe limits by a pair of leading-strings passed round the arm of a woman who sat in the shade of the doorway knitting. As M. Linders came up the narrow pathway she ran towards him to the utmost extent of her tether, uttering little joyous inarticulate cries, and bubbling over with the happy instinctive laughter of a child whose consciousness is bounded by its glad surroundings.

When, in moments of pseudo remorse, which would come upon him from time to time, it occurred to M. Linders to reflect upon his misdeeds, and adopt an apologetic tone concerning them, he was wont to propound a singular theory respecting his life, averring, in general terms, that it had been spoilt by women,—a speech more epigrammatic, perhaps, than accurate, since of the two women who had loved him best, his mother and his wife, he had broken the heart of the one, and ruined the happiness of the other. And yet it was not without its grain of meaning, however false and distorted; for M. Linders, who was not more consistent than

the rest of mankind, had, by some queer anomaly, along with all his hardness, and recklessness, and selfishness, a capacity for affection after his own fashion, and an odd sensitiveness to the praise and blame of those women whom he cared for and respected which did not originate merely in vanity and love of applause. He had been fond of his mother, though he had ignored her wishes and abused her generosity; and he had hated his sister Thérèse, because he imagined that she had come between them. Their reproaches had been unbearable to him, and though his wife had never blamed him in words, there had been a mute upbraiding in her mournful looks and dejected spirits, which he had resented as a wrong done to the love he had once felt for her. In the absence of many subjects for self-congratulation, he rather piqued himself on a warm heart and sensitive feelings, and chose to consider them ill-requited by the cold words and sad glances of those whose happiness he was destroying. The idea that he should set matters straight by adjusting his life to meet their preconceived notions of right and wrong, would have appeared to him highly absurd; but he considered them unreasonable and himself ill-used when they refused to give their approbation to his proceedings, and this idea of ill-usage and unreasonableness he

was willing to encourage, as it enabled him to shift the responsibility of their unhappiness from his own shoulders on to theirs, and to deaden the sense of remorse which would make itself felt from time to time. For in the worst of men, they say, there still lingers some touch of kindly human feeling, and M. Linders, though amongst the most worthless, was not perhaps absolutely the worst of men. He was selfish enough to inflict any amount of pain, yet not hardened enough to look unmoved on his victims. He had, in truth, taken both their misery and their reproaches to heart; and sometimes, especially since his wife's death, he had surprised in himself a strange, unaccountable desire for a love that should be true and pure, but which, ignorant of, or ignoring his errors, should be content to care for him and believe in him just as he was: such a love as his wife might, perhaps, have given him in her single month of unconscious happiness. It was a longing fitful, and not defined in words, but a real sentiment all the same, not a sentimentality; and, imperfect as it was in scope and tendency, it expressed the best part of the man's nature. He despised it, and crushed it down; but it lay latent, ready to be kindled by a touch.

And here was a small piece of womankind belonging to him, who could upbraid by neither word

nor look, who ran towards him confidently, stretching out tiny hands to clutch at his shining gold chain, and gazing up in his face with great brown eyes, that recalled to him those of her dead mother, when she had first known and learnt to love him. Had Madelon been a shy plain child — had she hidden her face, and run from him screaming to her nurse, as children are so wont to do, he would then and there have paid the money he had brought with him as the ostensible cause of his visit, and gone on his way, thinking no more about her for another two years perhaps. But Madelon had no thought of shyness with the tall fair handsome man who had taken her fancy: she stood for a moment in the pathway before him, balancing herself on tiptoe with uplifted arms, confident in the hope of being taken up; and, as the woman recognizing M. Linders, came forward and bade the child run to Papa, with a sudden unaccustomed emotion of tenderness, almost pathetic in such a man, he stooped down and raised her in his arms.

As he travelled back to Paris that day, M. Linders formed a plan which he lost no time in carrying, partially, at least, into execution. During the next twelvemonth he spent much of his time in Paris, and went frequently to see his small daughter, never without some gift to win her heart, till the

child came to regard his pocket as the inexhaustible source of boundless surprises, in the shape of toys and cakes and bonbons. It was not long before she was devoted to her father, and, her nurse dying when she was a little more than three years old, M. Linders resolved at once to carry out his idea, and, instead of placing her with any one else, take possession of her himself. He removed her accordingly from the country to Paris, engaged a *bonne*, and henceforth Madelon accompanied him wherever he went.

CHAPTER V.

Monsieur Linders' System.

My little lady had given Horace Graham a tolerably correct impression of her life as they had talked together in the moonlight at Chaudfontaine. When M. Linders took her home with him—if that may be called home which consisted of wanderings from one hotel to another—it was with certain fixed ideas concerning her, which he began by realizing with the success that not unfrequently attended his ideas when he set himself with a will to work them out. His child's love and trust he had already gained, as she had won suddenly for herself a place in his heart, and he started with the determination that these relations between them should never be disturbed. She should be educated for himself; she should be brought up to see with his eyes, to adopt his views; she should be taught no troublesome standard of right and wrong by which to measure him and find wanting; no cold shadow of doubt and reproach should ever rise between them and force them asunder; and above all, he would make her happy—she for one should never turn on him

and say, "See, my life is ruined, and it is you who have done it!" She should know no life, no aims, no wishes but his; but that life should be so free from care and sorrow that for once he would be able to congratulate himself on having made the happiness, instead of the misery, of some one whom he loved and who loved him.

These were the ideas that M. Linders entertained concerning Madelon, expressing them to himself in thoughts and language half genuine, half sentimental, as was his nature. But his love for his child was genuine enough; and for the fulfilment of his purpose he was willing to sacrifice much, devoting himself to her, and giving up time, comfort, and even money, for the sake of this one small being whom in all the world he loved, and who was to be taught to love him. He took her about with him; she associated with his companions; he familiarized her with all his proceedings, and she came in consequence to look upon their mode of life as being as much a matter of course, and a part of the great system of things, as the child does who sees her father go out to plough every day, or mount the pulpit every Sunday to preach his sermon. Of course she did not understand it all; it was his one object in life that she should not; and fondly as he loved his little Madelon, he did not scruple to make her

welfare subordinate to his own views. He was careful to keep her within the shady bounds of that world of no doubtful character, which he found wherever he went, hovering on the borders of the world of avowed honesty and respectability, jealously guarding her from every counter-influence, however good or beneficial. He would not send her to school, was half unwilling, indeed, that she should be educated in any way, lest she should come to the knowledge of good and evil, which he so carefully hid from her; and he even dismissed her good, kind-hearted *bonne*, on overhearing her instruct the child, who could then hardly speak plain, in some little hymn or prayer, or pious story, such as nurses delight in teaching their charges. After that he took care of her himself with the assistance of friendly landladies at the hotels he frequented, who all took an interest in and were kind to the little motherless girl, but were too busy to have any time to spend in teaching her, or enlarging her ideas; and indeed all the world conspired to carry out M. Linders' plan; for who would have cared, even had it been possible, to undertake the ungracious task of opening the eyes of a child to the real character of a father whom she loved and believed in so implicitly? And she was so happy, too! Setting aside any possible injury he might be doing her, M. Lin-

ders was the most devoted of fathers, loving and caring for her most tenderly, and thinking himself well repaid by the clinging grasp of her small hand, by the spring of joy with which she welcomed him after any absence, by her gleeful voice and laughter, her perfect trust and confidence in him.

There must have been something good and true about this man, roué and gambler though he was, that, somehow, he himself and those around him had missed hitherto, but that sprang willingly into life when appealed to by the innocent faith, the undoubting love of his little child. Thus much Madelon all unconsciously accomplished, but more than this she could not do. M. Linders did not become a reformed character for her sake: he had never had any particular principles, and Madelon's loving innocence, which aroused all his best emotions, had no power to stir in him any noble motives or high aspirations, which, if they existed at all, were buried too deep to be awakened by the touch of her small hand. His misdeeds had never occasioned him much uneasiness, except as they had affected the conduct of others towards himself; and he had no reproaches, expressed or implied, to fear from Madelon. "No one had ever so believed in him before!" he would sigh, with a feeling not without a certain pathos in its way, though with the ring of

false sentiment characteristic of the man, and with an apparent want of perception that it was ignorance rather than belief that was in question. Madelon believed indeed in his love, for it answered readily to her daily and hourly appeals, but she cannot be said to have believed in his honour and integrity, for she can hardly have known what they meant, and she made no claims upon *them*. It was, perhaps, happy for her that the day when she should have occasion to do so never arrived.

She was not left quite uneducated, however; her father taught her after his own fashion, and she gained a good deal of practical knowledge in their many wanderings. When she was six years old she could talk almost as many languages, could dance, and could sing a variety of songs with the sweetest, truest little voice; and by the time she was eight or nine, she had learned both to write and read, though M. Linders took care that her range of literature should be limited, and chiefly confined to books of fairy-tales, in which no examples drawn from real life could be found, to correct and confuse the single-sided views she received from him. This was almost the extent of her learning, but she picked up all sorts of odd bits of information, in the queer mixed society which M. Linders seemed everywhere to gather round him, and which ap-

peared to consist of waifs and strays from every grade of society—from reckless young English milords, Russian princes, and Polish counts, *soi-disant*, down to German students and penniless artists.

It was, no doubt, fortunate, even at this early age, that Madelon's little pale face, with its wide-open brown eyes, had none of the prettiness belonging to the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, golden-haired type of beauty, and that she thus escaped a world of flattery and nonsense. She was silent too in company, as a rule, keeping her chatter and laughter, for the most part, till she was alone with her father, and content sometimes to sit as quiet as a mouse for a whole evening, watching what was going on around her; she was too much accustomed to strangers ever to feel shy with them, but she cared little for them, unless, as in Horace Graham's case, they happened to take her fancy.

It must not be imagined, however, that M. Linders was quite without conscience as regarded his child; there were some people with whom he took care that she should not associate, some society into which he never took her. Many an evening did Madelon spend happily enough while her father was out, in the snug little parlours of the hotels, where Madame, the landlady, would be doing up her accounts perhaps, and Monsieur, the landlord, repos-

ing after the exertions of the day; whilst Mademoiselle Madelon, seated at the table, would build card-houses, or play at dominoes, and eat galette and confitures to her heart's content. Here, too, she would get queer little glimpses into life—hearing very likely how Monsieur B. had made off without paying his bill, or how those trunks that Madame la Comtesse C. had left eighteen months ago, as a pledge of her return, had been opened at last, and been found to contain nothing but old clothes, fit for the rag-market; how a few francs might be advantageously added on here and there in the bill for the rich English family at the *premier*; how the gentleman known as No. 5 was looked upon as a suspicious character; and how Pierre the waiter had been set to watch the door of No. 8, who had spent three months in the house without paying a sou, and was daily suspected of attempting to abscond. All these, and a dozen similar stories, and half the gossip of the town, would come buzzing round Madelon's ears as she sat gravely balancing one card on the top of the other. She heard and comprehended them with such comprehension as was in her; and no doubt they modified in some degree her childish views of life, which in these early years was presented to her, poor child! under no very sublime or elevated aspect; but they had little in-

terest for her, and she paid small heed to them. In truth, her passionate love for her father was, no doubt, at this time her great preservative and safeguard, ennobling her, as every pure unselfish passion must ennoble, and by absorbing her thoughts and heart, acting as a charm against many an unworthy influence around her. The first sound of his footstep outside was enough to put both stories and gossip out of her head, and was the signal for her to spring from her chair, and rush into the passage to meet him; and a few minutes after they would be seated together in their room upstairs, she nestling on his knee most likely, with her arm tight round his neck, while he recounted the adventures of the evening. His purse would be brought out, and it was Madelon's special privilege and treat to pour out the contents on the table and count them over. If M. Linders had won it was a little fête for both—calculations as to how it should be spent, where they should go the next day, what new toy, or frock, or trinket should be bought; if he had lost, there would be a moment of discouragement perhaps, and then Madelon would say,

“It does not signify, papa, does it?—you will win to-morrow, you know.”

As for M. Linders, the thought of the little, eager innocent face that would greet his return

home was the brightest and purest vision that lighted his dark and wayward life, and he appealed to his child's sympathy and encouragement in a way that had something touching in it, showing as it did the gentler side of a man who was always reckless, and could be hard and merciless enough sometimes; but he was never anything but tender with his little Madelon, and one can fancy the two sitting together, as she counts over the little gold pieces shining in the candlelight. Once, not long after his marriage, he had appealed to his wife in the same way, when, after an unusual run of luck, he had returned in triumph with his winnings. She, poor girl, looked first at them and then at him, with a piteous little attempt at a smile; then suddenly burst into tears, and turned away. It was the first and last time he tried to win her sympathy in these matters, and was, perhaps, the beginning of the sort of estrangement that grew up between them.

These were happy evenings, Madelon thought, but she found those happier still when her father was at home, generally with one or two men who would come in to play cards with him. They were always good-natured and kind to the little girl who sat so still and close to her father's side, watching the game with her quick, intelligent eyes; though some of them, foolish smooth-faced lads, perhaps,

would go away cursing the fate that had ever led them across M. Linders' path, and carrying an undying hatred in their hearts for the handsome courteous man who had enticed them on to ruin. How M. Linders lured these poor birds into the snare, and by what means he plucked them when there, Madelon never knew; all that belonged to the darker side of this character, which she never fully understood, and on which, for her sake, we will not dwell.

Most of all, however, did Madelon enjoy being at the German watering-places, for then she went out with her father constantly. The fair-haired, brown-eyed little girl was almost as well-known in the Kursaals of Homburg and Wiesbaden as the famous gambler himself, as evening after evening they entered the great lighted salons together, and took their places amongst the motley crowd gathered round the long green tables. There she would remain contented for hours, sometimes sitting on his knee, sometimes herself staking a florin or two—"to change the luck," M. Linders would say laughingly,—sometimes wearied out, curled up fast asleep in a corner of one of the sofas. Then there were the theatres, to which her father often took her, and where, with delighted, wondering eyes, she made acquaintance with most of the best operas,

and learnt to sing half Bellini's and Weber's music in her clear little voice. More than once, too, she was taken behind the scenes, where she saw so much of the mysteries of stage-working and carpentering as would have destroyed the illusions of an older person; but it did not make much difference to her; the next time she found herself in the stalls or balcony she forgot all about what was going on behind, and was as much enchanted as ever with the fine results prepared for the public gaze.

On other nights there would be the balls, always a supreme enjoyment. It must be owned that Madelon took great pleasure in seeing her small person arrayed in a smart frock; and she was never weary of admiring the big rooms with their gilded furniture, and mirrors, and brilliant lights, and polished floors, where a crowd of gay people would be twirling about to the sound of the music. She danced like a little fairy, too, with pure delight in the mere motion, was never tired, and rarely sat down; for Mademoiselle, who generally held herself rather aloof from strangers, would be pleased on these occasions to put on a little winning graciousness, giving her hand with the air of a small princess to any one soliciting the honour of a dance; and she was seldom without some tall partner,

attracted by her *gentillesse* and naïve prattle—a moustached Austrian or Prussian officer, perhaps, in white or blue uniform, or one of her counts or barons, with a bit of ribbon dangling from his button-hole; or, if all else failed, there was always her father, who was ever ready to indulge her in any of her fancies, and never resisted her coaxing pleading for one more dance.

These were the evenings; for the days there were pleasures enough too, though of a simpler kind, and more profitable, perhaps, for our poor little Madelon, in her gay unconscious dance through that mad Vanity Fair, innocent though it was for her as yet.

Except on some special emergency, M. Linders rarely went to the gambling tables during the day. He had a theory that daylight was prejudicial to his prosperity, and that it was only at night that he could play there with any fair chance of success; but he not unfrequently had other business of a similar nature on hand to occupy his mornings and afternoons; and when he was engaged or absent, Madelon, with the happy adaptability of a solitary child, had no difficulty in amusing herself alone with her toys, and picture-books, and dolls. At other times, when her father was at leisure, there would be walks with him, long afternoons spent in

the gay Kursaal gardens, listening to the bands of music; and on idle days, which with M. Linders were neither few nor far between, excursions perhaps into the country, sometimes the two alone, but more frequently accompanied by one or two of M. Linders' companions. There they would dine at some rustic Gasthof, and afterwards, whilst her father and his friends smoked, drank their Rhine wine, and brought out the inevitable cards and dice in the shady, vine-trellised garden, Madelon, wandering about here and there, in and out, through yard and court, and garden and kitchen, poking her small nose everywhere, gained much primary information on many subjects, from the growing of cabbages to the making sauerkraut—from the laying of eggs by ever-hopeful hens, to their final fulfilment of a ruthless destiny in a frying-pan. In return, she was not unwilling to impart to the good Hausfrau, and her troop of little ones and retainers, many details concerning her town life; and might sometimes be found, perched on the kitchen table, relating long histories to an admiring audience, in which the blue silk frocks and tall partners made no small figure, one may be sure.

It was a golden childhood. Even in after years, when, reading the history of these early days in a new light, she suffered a pang for almost every

pleasure she had then enjoyed, even then Madelon maintained that her childhood had been one of unclouded happiness, such as few children know. The sudden changes of fortune, from splendour to poverty of the shabbiest description, the reckless, dishonest expenditure, and the endless debts consequent on it; the means—doubtful to say the least of them—employed by M. Linders for procuring money; the sense of alienation from all that is best, and noblest, and truest in life;—all these, which had gone far to make up the sum of her mother's misery, affected our Madelon hardly at all. Some of them she did not know of; the rest she took as a matter of course. In truth, it mattered little to her whether they lived in a big hotel or a little one; whether the debts were paid or unpaid; whether money were forthcoming or not; she never felt the want of it, we may be sure. If she did not have some promised fête or amusement on one day, it was certain to come on another; and even the one or two occasions on which M. Linders, absolutely unable to leave an hotel until he had paid part of what he owed there, had been obliged to confiscate everything, caused her no uneasiness. The next week, very likely, she had other trinkets and knick-knacks, newer and prettier; and indeed, so long as she had her father, she cared for little else. In any small

childish misfortune or ailment she had but to run to him to find help, and sympathy, and caresses; and she had no grief or care in these first years for which these were not a sufficient remedy.

Amidst all the miserable failures, and more unworthy successes of a wasted life, M. Linders gained at least one legitimate triumph, when he won his child's undying love and gratitude. All her life long, one may fancy, would Madelon cherish the remembrance of his unceasing tenderness, of his unwearying love for his little girl, which showed itself in a thousand different ways, and which, with one warm, loving little heart, at any rate, would ever go far to cover a multitude of sins. The only drawback to her perfect content in these early days was the presence of her uncle Charles, whom she could not bear, and who, for his part, looked upon her as a mere encumbrance, and her being with them at all as a piece of fatuity on the part of his brother-in-law. There were constant skirmishes between them while they were together; but even these ceased after a time, for Moore, who, ever since his sister's marriage, had clung fitfully to M. Linders, as a luckier and more prosperous man than himself, was accustomed to be absent on his own account for months together, and during one of these solitary journeys he died, about two years

after Horace Graham had seen him at Chaudfontaine. Henceforth Madelon and her father were alone.

Madelon, then, by the time she was eight years old, had learnt to sing, dance, speak several languages, to write, to play *rouge et noir*, and *roulette*, and indeed *piquet* and *écarté*, too, to great perfection, and to read books of fairy tales. At ten years old, her education was still at the same point; and it must be owned that, however varied and sufficient for the purposes of the moment, it left open a wide field for labour in future years; though M. Linders appeared perfectly satisfied with the results of his teaching so far, and showed no particular desire to enlarge her ideas upon any point. As for religion, no wild Arab of our London streets ever knew or heard less about it than did our little Madelon; or was left more utterly uninstructed in its simplest truths and dogmas. What M. Linders' religious beliefs were, or whether he had any at all, we need not inquire. He at least took care that none should be instilled into his child's mind; feeling, probably, that under whatever form they were presented to her, they would assuredly clash sooner or later with his peculiar system of education. For himself, his opinions on such matters were expressed when occasion arose, only in certain unvarying and vehement declamations against priests

and nuns—the latter particularly, where his general sense of aversion to a class in the abstract, became specific and definite, when he looked upon that class as represented in the person of his sister Thérèse.

Of the outward forms and ceremonies of religion Madelon could not, indeed, remain entirely ignorant, living constantly, as she did, in Roman Catholic countries; but her very familiarity with these from her babyhood robbed them in great measure of the interest they might otherwise have excited in her mind, and their significance she was never taught to understand. As a rule, a child must have its attention drawn in some particular way to its everyday surroundings, or they must strike it in some new and unfamiliar light, before they rouse more than a passing curiosity; and though Madelon would sometimes question her father as to the meaning and intention of this or that procession passing along the streets, he found no difficulty in putting her off with vague answers. It was a wedding or a funeral, he would say, or connected with some other ordinary event, which Madelon knew to be of daily recurrence; though none such had as yet had part in the economy of her small world; and priests, and nuns, and monks became classed, without difficulty, in her mind, with doctors and soldiers, and

the mass of people generally, who made money in a different way from her father, with whom, therefore, she seldom came into personal contact, and with whom she had little to do—money making being still her one idea of the aim and business of life.

The first time, however, that she ever entered a church, when she was little more than nine years old, was an experience in her life, and this was the occasion of it. It was in a French provincial town, where M. Linders had stopped for a day on business—only for one day, but that Madelon was to spend for the most part alone; for her father, occupied with his affairs, was obliged to go out very early, and leave her to her own devices; and very dull she found them, after the first hour or two. She was a child of many resources, it is true, but these will come to an end when a little girl of nine years old, with books and dolls all packed up, has to amuse herself for ever so many hours in a dull country hotel, an hotel, too, which was quite strange to her, and where she could not, therefore, fall back upon the society and conversation of a friendly landlady. Madelon wandered upstairs and downstairs, looked out of all the windows she could get at, and at last stood leaning against the hall-door, which opened on to the front courtyard. It was very quiet and very dull, nothing moving anywhere; no one crossed

the square, sunny space, paved with little stones, and adorned with the usual round-topped trees, in green boxes. Inside the house there was an occasional clatter of plates and dishes, or the resonant nasal cry of "Auguste," or "Henri," from one or other of the servants, but that was all. Madelon found it too tiresome; the *porte-cochère* stood half open, she crossed the courtyard and peeped out. She saw a quiet, sunny street, with not much more life or movement than there was within, but still a little better. Over the high walls surrounding the houses opposite green trees were waving; at one end of the street there was the gleam of a river, a bridge, and a row of poplars; the other end she could not see, for the street made a bend, and a fountain with dribbling water filled up the angle. Presently a little boy in a blue blouse, and a little girl with a tight round white cap, came up to the stone basin, each with a pitcher to fill; they were a long time about it, for what could be pleasanter, on this hot summer morning, than to stand dabbling one's fingers in the cool water? Madelon watched them till she became possessed with an irresistible desire to do the same. It was only a few steps off, and though she was strictly forbidden by her father ever to go out alone, still—she had so seldom an opportunity of being naughty, that her present con-

sciousness of disobedience rather added, perhaps, to the zest of the adventure. She would go just for this once—and in another moment she was out in the street. The little boy and girl fled with full pitchers as she came up to the fountain, suddenly awakened to a sense of the waste of time in which they had been indulging; but that made no difference to Madelon; she stood gazing with mute admiration at the open-mouthed monsters, from whose wide jaws the water trickled into the basin below; and then she held her hands to catch the drops till they were quite cold, and thought it the best play she had ever known. By-and-by, however, she began to look about her in search of further excitement, and, emboldened by success, turned the corner of the street, and ventured out of sight of the hotel. On one side large *porte-cochères* at intervals, shutting in the white, green-shuttered houses, that appeared beyond; on the other a long, high, blank wall, with nothing to be seen above it, and one small arched doorway about half-way down. This was the shady side; and Madelon, crossing over to it, arrived at the arched door, and stood for a moment contemplating it, wondering what could be inside.

She was not left long in doubt, for two priests crossed the road, and pushed open the door, without

seeing the child, who, urged by a spirit of curiosity, crept unnoticed after them, and suddenly found herself in a cloister, running round a quadrangle, on one side of which rose the walls and spires and buttresses of a great church; in the centre a carefully kept space of smooth grass. Madelon stood for a moment motionless with delight; it reminded her of a scene in some opera or play to which she had been in Paris with her father, but, oh! how much more beautiful, and all real! The sunlight streamed through the tracery of the cloisters, and fell chequered with sharp shadows on the pavement; the bright blue sky was crossed with pinnacles and spires, and there was an echo of music from the church which lured her on. The two priests walked quickly along, she followed, and all three entered the building by a side door together.

A vast, dim church, with long aisles and lofty pillars, which seemed to Madeleine's unpractised eye, fresh from the outer glare, to vanish in infinite mysterious gloom; a blaze of light, at the far-off high altar, with its priests, and incense, and gorgeous garments and tall candles; on every side shrines and tapers, and pictures, awful, agonised, compassionate Saviours, sad, tender Madonnas; a great silent multitude of kneeling people, and, above all, the organ peeling out, wave after wave of sound, which seemed

to strike her, surround her, thrill her with a sense of—what? What was it all? What did it all mean? An awful instinct suddenly woke in the child's heart, painfully struggling with inarticulate cries, as it were, to make itself understood, even to herself. Wholly inarticulate, for she had been taught no words that could express, however feebly, these vague yearnings, these unutterable longings, suddenly stirring in her heart. This wonderful, solemn music, this place, so strange, so separate from any other she had known, what was it? what did it all mean? Ah, yes, what did it all mean? A little girl, no older than herself, who knelt close by the door, with careless eyes that roamed everywhere, and stared wondering at Madelon's cotton frock and rough uncovered little head, could have explained it all very well; she had a fine gilt prayer-book in her hand, and knew most of her Catechism, and could have related the history of all the saints in the church; she did not find it at all impressive, though she liked coming well enough on these grand fête-days, when everyone wore their best clothes, and she could put on her very newest frock. But our little stray Madelon, who knew of none of all these things, could find nothing better to do at last than to creep into a dark corner, between a side chapel and a confessional, crouch down, and begin to sob with all her heart.

Presently the music ceased, and the people went pouring out of the great doors of the church. Madelon, roused by the movement around her, looked up, dried her eyes, and came out of her corner; then, following the stream, found herself once more outside, not in the cloister by the door of which she had entered, but at the top of a wide flight of steps, leading down to a large sunny Place, surrounded with houses, where a fair was going on. She was fairly bewildered; she had never been in the town before, and though, in fact, not very far from the hotel where she was staying, she felt completely lost.

As she stood still for a moment, in the midst of the dispersing crowd, looking scared and dazed enough very likely, she once more attracted the attention of the little girl who had been kneeling near her in the church, and who now pointed her out to her parents, good, substantial-looking *bourgeois*.

"*Comme elle a l'air drôle,*" said the child, "with her hair all rough, and that old cotton frock!"

"She looks as if she had lost someone," says the kindly mother. "I will ask her."

"No, she had not lost anyone," Madelon said, in answer to her inquiries, "but she did not know where she was; could Madame tell her the way to the Hôtel de l'Aigle d'Or?"

"It is quite near," Madame answered; "we are

going that way; if you like to come with us, we will show it to you."

So Madelon followed the three down the broad steps, and out into the Place, where she looked a queer little figure enough, perhaps, in the midst of all the gay holiday-folk who were gathered round the booths and stalls. She did not concern herself about that, however, for her mind was still full of what she had seen and heard in the church; and she walked on silently, till presently Madame, with some natural curiosity as to this small waif and stray she had picked up, said, "Are you staying at the hotel, *ma petite?*"

"Yes," answered Madelon, "we came there last night."

"And how was it you went to church all alone?"

"Papa had to go out," says Madelon, getting rather red and confused, "and I was so dull by myself, and I—I went out into the street, and got into the church by a little door at the side—not that other one we came out at just now; so I did not know where I was, nor the way back again."

"Then you are a stranger here, and have never been to the church before?" said Monsieur.

"No," said Madelon; and then, full of her own

ideas, she asked abruptly—"what was everyone doing in there?"

"In there!—in the church, do you mean?"

"Yes, in the church—what was everyone doing?"

"But do you not know, then," said the mother, "that it is to-day a great fête—the fête of the Assumption?"

"No," said Madelon, "I did not know. Was that why so many people were there? What were they doing?" she persisted.

"How do you mean?—do you not go to the *messe* every Sunday?" said Madame, surprised.

"To the *messe*!" answered Madelon—"what is that? I never was in a church before."

"Never in a church before!" echoed a chorus of three astonished voices, while Monsieur added—"Never in this church, you mean."

"No," answered Madelon, "it is the first time I ever went into a church at all."

"But, *mon enfant*," said the mother, "you are big enough to have gone to church long before this. Why, you must be eight or nine years old, and Nanette here went to the *grande messe* before she was five—did you not, Nanette?"

"Yes," says Nanette, with a further sense of superiority added to that already induced by the

contrast of her new white muslin frock with Madelon's somewhat limp exterior.

"And never missed it for a single Sunday or fête-day since," continued Madame, "except last year, when she had the measles."

"Do you go there every Sunday?" asked Madelon of the child.

"Yes, every Sunday and fête-days. Would you like to see my new Paroissien? My god-father gave it to me on my last birthday."

"And is it always like to-day, with all the singing, and music, and people?"

"Yes, always the same, only not always quite so grand, you know, because to-day is a great fête. Why don't you go to church always?"

"She is perhaps a little Protestant," suggested the father, "and goes to the Temple. Is that not it, my child?"

"I do not know," said Madelon, bewildered; "I never went to any Temple, and I never heard of Protestants. Papa never took me to church; but then we do not live here, you know."

"But in other churches it is the same—everywhere," cries Madame.

"What, in all the big churches in Paris, and everywhere?" said Madelon. "I did not know; I

never went into them, but I will ask papa to take me there now." Then, recurring to her first difficulty, she repeated, "But what do people go there for?"

"Mais—pour prier le bon Dieu!" said the good man.

"I do not understand," said Madelon, despairingly. "What does that mean? What were the music and the lights for, and what were all the pictures about?"

"But is it, then, possible, *ma petite*, that you have had no one to teach you all these things? And on Sundays, what do you do then?" said the mother, while Nanette stared more and more at Madelon, with round eyes.

"We generally go into the country on Sundays," said Madelon. "Papa never goes to church, I am sure, or he would have taken me. I will ask him to let me go again—I like it very much." It was at this moment that they turned into the street in which stood the hotel. "Ah! there is papa," cried Madelon, rushing forward as she saw him coming towards them, and springing into his arms. He had returned to the hotel for a late *déjeuner*, and was in terrible dismay when Madelon, being sought for, was nowhere to be found. One of the waiters said he had

seen her run out of the courtyard, and M. Linders was just going out to look for her.

“*Mon Dieu!* Madelon,” he cried, “where, then, have you been?”

“I ran out, papa,” said Madelon, abashed. “I am very sorry—I will not do it again. I lost myself, but Monsieur and Madame here showed me the way back.”

Her friendly guides stood watching the two for a moment, as, after a thousand thanks and acknowledgments, they entered the hotel together.

“It is singular,” said Madame; “he is handsome, and looks like a gentleman. How can anyone bring up a little child like that in such ignorance? She can have no mother, *pauvre petite!*”

“What an odd little girl, Maman,” cried Nanette, “never to have been to church before, and not to know why people go!”

“*Chut*, Nanette!” said her father. “Thou also wouldst have known nothing, unless some good friends had taught thee.” And so these kindly people went their way.

Madelon, meanwhile, was relating all her adventures to her father. He was too rejoiced at having found her again to scold her for running away; but he was greatly put out, nevertheless, as he listened

to her little history. Here, then, was an emergency, such as he had dimly foreseen, and done much to avoid, which yet had come upon him unawares, without fault of his, and which he was quite unprepared to meet. He did not, indeed, fully understand its importance, nor all that was passing in his child's mind; but he did perceive that she had caught a glimpse through doors he had vainly tried to keep closed to her, and that that one glance had so aroused her curiosity and interest, that it would be less easy than usual to satisfy her.

"Why do you never go to church, papa?" she was asking. "Why do you not take me? It was so beautiful, and there were such numbers of people. Why do we not go?"

"I don't care about it myself," he answered, at last, "but you shall go again some day, *ma petite*, if you like it so much."

"May I?" said Madelon. "And will you take me, papa? What makes so many people go? Madame said they went every Sunday and *fête* day."

"I suppose they like it," answered M. Linders. "Some people go every day, and all day long—nuns, for instance, who have nothing else to do."

"It is, then, when people have nothing else to

do that they go?" asked Madelon, misunderstanding him, with much simplicity.

"Something like it," answered M. Linders, rather grimly; then, with a momentary compunction, added, "Not precisely. They do it also, I suppose, because they think it right."

"And do you not think it right, papa? Why should they? I have seen people coming out of church before, but I never knew what it was like inside. I *may* go again some day?"

"When you are older, my child, I will take you again, perhaps."

"But that little girl Nanette, papa, was only five years old when she went first, her mother said, and I have never been at all," said Madelon, feeling rather aggrieved.

"Well, when we go to Florence next winter, Madelon, you shall visit all the churches. They are much more splendid than these, and have the most beautiful pictures, which I should like you to see."

"And will there be music, and lights, and flowers there, the same as here, papa?"

"Oh! for that, it is much the same everywhere," replied M. Linders. "People are much alike all the world over, as you will find, Madelon. Priests, and mummary, and a gaping crowd, to stare and say,

‘How wonderful! how beautiful!’ as you do now, *ma petite*; but you shall know better some day.”

He spoke with a certain bitterness that Madelon did not understand, any more than she did his little speech; but it silenced her for a moment, and then she said more timidly,

“But, papa——”

“Well, Madelon!”

“But, papa, he said—*ce Monsieur*—he said that people go to church *pour prier le bon Dieu*. What did he mean? We often say ‘*Mon Dieu*,’ and I have heard them talk of *le bon Dieu*; is that the same? Who is He then—*le bon Dieu*?”

M. Linders did not at once reply. Madelon was looking up into his face with wide-open perplexed eyes, frowning a little with an unusual effort of thought, with the endeavour to penetrate a momentous mystery, which she instinctively felt lay somewhere, and which she looked to him to explain; and he *could* not give her a careless, mocking answer; he sat staring blankly at her for a few seconds, and then said slowly,

“I cannot tell you.”

“Do you not know, papa?”

“Yes, yes, certainly I know,” he answered hastily, and with some annoyance; “but—in short,

Madelon, you are too young to trouble your head about these things; you cannot understand them possibly; when you are older you shall have them explained to you."

"When, papa?"

"Oh, I don't know—one of these days, when you are a great girl, grown up."

"And you can't tell me now?" said Madelon, a little wistfully; "but you will let me go to the church again before that? Oh, indeed it was beautiful, with the lights, and the singing, and the music. Do you know, papa, it made me cry," she added, in a half whisper.

"*Vraiment!*" said M. Linders, with some contempt in his voice, and a slight, involuntary shrug of the shoulders.

The contempt was for a class of emotion with which he had no sympathy, and for that which he imagined had called it forth; not for his little Madelon, nor for her expression of it. But the child shrank back, blushing scarlet. He saw his mistake, perhaps, for he drew her towards him again, and with a tender caress and word tried to turn her thoughts in another direction; but it was too late; the impression had been made, and could never again be effaced. All unconsciously, with that one

inadvertent word, M. Linders had raised the first slight barrier between himself and his child, had given the first shock to that confidence which he had fondly hoped was ever to exist undisturbed between them. In the most sacred hour her short life had yet known, Madeleine had appealed to him for help and sympathy, and she had been repulsed without finding either. She did not indeed view it in that light, nor believe in and love him the less; she only thought she must have been foolish; but she took well to heart the lesson that she should henceforth keep such folly to herself—as far as he was concerned, at any rate.

As for M. Linders, this little conversation left him alarmed, perplexed, uneasy. What if, after all, this small being whom he had proposed to identify, as it were, with himself, by teaching her to see with his eyes, to apprehend with his understanding, what if she were beginning to develop an independent soul, to have thoughts, notions, ideas of her own, perhaps, to look out into life with eager eyes that would penetrate beyond the narrow horizon it had pleased him to fix as her range of vision, to ask questions whose answers might lead to awkward conclusions? For the moment it seemed to him that his whole system of education, which had worked so well hitherto, was beginning to totter, ready at

any time, it might be, to fall into ruins, leaving him and his child vainly calling to each other across an ever-widening, impassable gulf. Already he foresaw as possible results all that he had most wished to avoid, and felt himself powerless to avert them; for, however ready to alienate her from good influences, and expose her to bad ones, he yet shrank from inculcating falsehood and wrong by precept. With a boy it would have been different, and he might have had little hesitation in bringing him up, by both precept and example, in the way he was to go; but with his little innocent woman-child—no, it was impossible. She must be left to the silent and negative teachings of surrounding influences, and in ignorance of all others; and what if these should fail? Perhaps he over-estimated the immediate danger, not taking sufficiently into account the strength and loyalty of her affection for him; but, on the other hand, he perhaps undervalued the depth and force of those feelings to the consciousness of which she had first been roused that day. “It shall not occur again, and in time she will forget all about it,” was his first conclusion. His second was perhaps wiser in his generation, taking into consideration a wider range of probabilities. “No,” he reflected, “there has been an error somewhere. I should have accustomed Madelon to all

these things, and then she would have thought nothing of them. Well, that shall be remedied, for she shall go to every church in Florence, and so get used to them."

CHAPTER VI.

At Florence.

IF we have dwelt with disproportionate detail on the above little incident, we must be forgiven in consideration of its real importance to our Madeleine, marking, as it did, the commencement of a new era in her life. The sudden inspiration that had kindled for a moment in the great church died away, indeed, as newer impressions more imperatively claimed her attention; but the memory of it remained as a starting point to which any similar sensations subsequently recurring might be referred, as a phenomenon which seemed to contain within itself the germ and possible explanation of a thousand vague aspirations, yearnings which began about this time to spring up in her mind, and which almost unconsciously linked themselves with that solemn hour the remembrance of which, after her conversation with her father, she had set apart in her own heart, to be pondered on from time to time, but in silence,—a reticence too natural and legitimate not to be followed by a hundred others of a similar kind.

M. Linders, for reasons of his own, with which we need not concern ourselves here, spent the following autumn and winter in Florence, establishing himself in an apartment for the season, contrary to his usual practice of living in hotels; and this was how it happened that Madelon made two friends who introduced quite a new element into her life, one which, under other circumstances, might hardly have entered into it as a principle of education at all. The rooms M. Linders had taken were on the third floor of a large palazzo with many occupants, where a hundred feet daily passed up and down the common staircase, the number of steps they had to tread increasing for the most part in direct proportion to their descent in the social grade which, with sufficiently imposing representatives on the first floor, reached its minimum, in point of wealth and station, in the fifth storey garret. On the same floor as Madelon and her father, but on the opposite side of the corridor, lived an American artist; and M. Linders had not been a week in the house before he recognized in him an ancient *confrère* of his old Parisian artist days, who, after many wanderings to and fro on the earth, had finally settled himself in Florence. The old intimacy was renewed without difficulty on either side. M. Linders was made free of the American's

atelier, and he, for his part, willingly smoked his pipe of an evening in the Frenchman's little salon. He was a great black-bearded yellow-faced fellow, with a certain careless joviality about him, that made him popular, though leading a not very respectable life; always extravagant, always in debt, and not averse to a little gambling and betting when they came in his way. He was a sufficiently congenial spirit for M. Linders to associate with freely; but he was kind-hearted, honourable after his own fashion, and had redeeming points in an honest enthusiasm, in a profound conviction of the grand possibilities of life in general, and of his art in particular. He was no great artist, and his business consisted mainly in making copies of well-known pictures, which he did with great skill, so that they always commanded a ready sale in the Florence market. But he also painted a variety of original subjects, and, in unambitious moments, occasionally surprised himself by producing some charming little picture which encouraged him to persevere in this branch of his art.

This man took a great fancy to Madelon, in the first instance from hearing how prettily and deftly she spoke English; and she, after holding herself aloof in dignified reserve for three days from this new acquaintance, was suddenly won over in a

visit to his *atelier*, which henceforth became to her a sort of wonderland, a treasure domain, where she might come and go as she pleased, and where, from beneath much accumulated dust, persevering fingers might extract unimagined prizes, in the shape of sketches, drawings, plaster casts, prints, and divers queer possessions of different kinds. After this, she soon became fast friends with the American, who was very kind and good-natured to her, and M. Linders' promise that she should see all the churches in Florence was fulfilled by the artist. He took her to visit both them and the galleries, showed her the famous pictures, and told her the names of their painters; and the genuine reverence with which he gazed on them, his ever-fresh enjoyment and appreciation of them, impressed her, child as she was, far more than any mere expressions of admiration or technical explanation of their merits would have done.

Sometimes, if she accompanied him to any of the churches where he happened to be copying a picture, he would leave her to wander about alone, and they were strange weird hours that she spent in this way. She did not indeed again assist at any of the great church ceremonies, but the silent spaces of these chill, grand, solemn interiors impressed her scarcely less with a sense of mysterious

awe. Tapers twinkled in dim side chapels, pictures and mosaics looked down on her from above, rare footsteps echoed along the marble pavements, silent figures knelt about here and there, pillars, marbles, statues gleamed, and heavy doors and curtains shut in the shadowy, echoing, silent place from the sunshine, and blue sky, and many coloured life without. Madelon, wandering about in the gloom, gliding softly into every nook and corner, gazing at tombs and decorated altars and pictures, wondered more and more at this strange new world in which she found herself, and which she had no one to interpret to her. It had a mysterious attraction for her, as nothing had ever had before; and yet it was almost a relief at last to escape again into the warm, sunny out-of-door life, to walk home with the painter through the bright narrow streets, listening to his gay careless talk, and lingering, perhaps, at some stall, in the busy market-place, to buy grapes and figs; and then to take a walk with her father into the country, where roses nodded at her over garden walls, and vines were yellowing beneath the autumn sky. Her sensitive perception of beauty and grandeur was so much greater than her power of grasping and comprehending them, that her poor little mind became oppressed and bewildered by the disproportion between the vividness with which

she received new impressions, and her ability for seizing their meaning.

The pictures themselves, which, before long, she learnt to delight in, and even in some sort to appreciate, were a perpetual source of perplexity to her in the unknown subjects they represented. Her want of knowledge in such matters was so complete that her American friend, who, no doubt, took it for granted that she had been brought up in the religion of the country, never even guessed at it, not imagining that a child could remain so utterly uninstructed in the simple facts and histories; and, somehow, Madelon divined this, and began to have a shy reluctance in asking questions which would betray an unsuspected ignorance. "This is such or such a Madonna," the artist would say; "there you see St. Elizabeth, and that is St. John the Baptist, you know." Or he would point out St. Agnes, or St. Cecilia, or St. Catherine, as the case might be.

"Who was St. Catherine?" Madelon ventured to ask one day.

"Did you never hear of her?" he answered. "Well then, I will tell you all about her. There were, in fact, two St. Catherines, but this one here, who, you see, has a wheel, lived long before the other. There once dwelt in Alexandria a lovely

and accomplished maiden—" And he would no doubt have related to her the whole of the beautiful old mystical legend; but her father, who happened to be with them that day, interrupted him.

"Don't stuff the child's head with that nonsense," he said, and, perhaps, afterwards gave his friend a hint; for Madelon heard no more about the saints, and was left to puzzle out meanings and stories for the pictures for herself—and queer enough ones she often made, very likely. On the other hand, the American, who liked to talk to her in his own tongue, and to make her chatter to him in return, would tell her many a story of the old master painters, of Cimabue and the boy Giotto, of Lionardo da Vinci, and half a dozen others; old, old tales of the days when, as we sometimes fancy, looking back through the mist of centuries, there were giants on the earth, but all new and fresh to our little Madelon, and with a touch of romance and poetry about them as told by the enthusiastic artist, which readily seized her imagination; indeed he himself, with his black velvet cap, and short pipe, and old coat, became somehow ennobled and idealised in her simple mind by his association through his art with the mighty men he was teaching her to reverence.

Madelon spent much of her time in the painter's

atelier, for her father took it into his head this winter to try his hand once more at his long-neglected art, and, armed with brushes and palette, passed many of his leisure hours in his friend's society. We cannot accredit M. Linders with any profound penetration, or with any subtle perception of what was working in his little daughter's mind, but with the most far-reaching wisdom he could hardly have devised better means, at this crisis in her life, for maintaining his old hold upon her, and keeping up the sense of sympathy between them, which had in one instance been disturbed and endangered.

She was just beginning to be conscious of the existence of a new and glorious world, where money-making was, on the whole, in abeyance, and roulette-tables and croupiers had apparently no existence at all; and the sight of her father at his easel day after day, at once connected him with it, as it were, since he also could produce pictures—*tout comme un autre*. Then M. Linders could talk well on most subjects, and in the discussions that the two men would not unfrequently hold concerning pictures, Madelon was too young, and had too strong a conviction of her father's perfect wisdom, to discern between his mere clever knowledge of art and the American's pure love and enthusiasm;

or if, with some instinctive sense of the difference, she turned more readily to the latter for information, that was because it was his *métier*; whereas with papa——Oh! with papa it was only an amusement; his business was of quite another kind.

The American amused himself by painting Madelon more than once; and she made a famous little model, sitting still and patiently for hours to him and to her father, who had a knack of producing any number of little, affected, meretricious pictures, in the worst possible style and taste. Years afterwards, Madelon revisited the studio, where the black-bearded friendly American, grown a little bent and a little grey, was still stepping backwards and forwards before the same easel standing in the old place; orange and pomegranate trees still bloomed in the windows; footsteps still passed up and down the long corridor outside where her light childish ones had so often echoed; the old properties hung about on the walls; and there, amongst dusty rolls piled up in a corner, Madelon came upon more than one portrait of herself, a pale-faced, curly-headed child, who looked out at her from the canvas with wistful brown eyes that seemed full of the thoughts that at that time had begun to agitate her poor little brain. How the sight of them brought back the old vanished days!

How it stirred within her sudden tender recollections of the quiet hours when, dressed out in some quaint head-gear, or *contadina* costume, or merely in her own everyday frock, she had sat perched up on a high stool, or on a pile of boxes, dreaming to herself, or listening to the talk between the two men.

"That man is a fool," the American would exclaim, dashing his brush across a whole morning's work; "that man is a presumptuous fool who, here in Florence, here where those others have lived and died, dares to stand before an easel and imagine that he can paint—and I have been that man!" He was wont to grow noisy and loquacious over his failures—not moody and dumb, as some men do.

"You concern yourself too much," M. Linders would reply calmly, putting the finishing touch to Madelon as a *bergère* standing in the midst of a flock of sheep, and a green landscape—like the enlarged top of a *bonbonnière*. "You are too ambitious, *mon cher*—you are little, and want to be great—hence your discomfort; whilst I, who am little, and know it, remain content."

"May I be spared such content!" growled the other, who was daily exasperated by the atrocities his friend produced by way of pictures. It was

beyond his comprehension how any man could paint such to his disgrace, and then calmly contemplate them as the work of his own hands. "Heaven preserve me from such content, I say!"

"But it is there you are all in the wrong," says M. Linders, quite unmoved by his companion's uncomplimentary energy. "You agitate, you disturb yourself with the idea that some day you will become something great—you begin to compare yourself with these men whose works you are for ever copying, with who knows?—with Raffaele, with Da Vinci——"

"I compare myself with them!" cries the American, interrupting him. "I! No, *mon ami*, I am not quite such a fool as that. I reverence them, I adore their memory, I bow down before their wonderful genius"—and as he spoke he lifted his cap from his head, suiting his action to his words—"but compare myself!—I!" Then picking up his brush again, he added, "But the world needs its little men as well as its great ones—at any rate, the little ones need their *pot au feu*; so to work again. *Allons, ma petite*, your head a little more this way."

This little conversation, which occurred nearly at the beginning of their acquaintance, the painter's

words and manner, his energy, his simple, dignified gesture as he raised his cap—all made a great impression on our Madelon; it was indeed one of her first lessons in that hero-worship whereby lesser minds are brought into *rapproch* with great ones; and, even while they reverence afar off, exultingly feel that they in some sort share in their genius through their power of appreciating it. Nor was it her last lesson of the same kind.

Her second friend was an old German violinist, who inhabited two little rooms at the top of the big house, a tall, broad-shouldered, stooping man, whose thick yellow hair and moustache, plentifully mixed with grey, blue eyes, and fair complexion, testified to his nationality, as did his queer, uncouth accent, though he had spent at least two-thirds of his life in Florence. He was an old friend of the American painter's, and paid frequent visits to his studio; and it was there he first met Madelon and her father. He did not much affect M. Linders' company, but he took a fancy to the child, as indeed most people did, and made her promise that she would come and see him; and when she had once found her way, and been welcomed to his little bare room, where an old piano, a violin, and heaps of dusty folios of music, were the principal furniture, a day seldom passed without her paying

him a visit. She would perch herself at his window, which commanded a wide view over the city, with its countless roofs, and domes, and towers, and beyond the encircling hills, with their scattered villas, and slopes of terraced gardens, and pines, and olives, all under the soft blue transparent sky; and with her eyes fixed on this sunny view, Madelon would go off into some dreamy fit, as she listened to the violinist, of whose playing she never wearied. He was devoted to his art, though he had never attained to any remarkable proficiency in it; and at any hour of the day he might be heard scraping, and tuning, and practising, for he belonged to the orchestra of one of the theatres. It was quite a new sensation for Madelon to hear so much music in private life, and she thought it all beautiful—tuning and scraping and all.

“But that is all rubbish,” the German would cry, after spending an hour in going through some trashy modern Italian music. “Now, my child, you shall hear something worth listening to;” and with a sigh of relief he would turn to some old piece by Mozart or Bach, some minuet of Haydn’s, some romance of Beethoven’s, which he would play with no great power of execution, indeed, but with a rare sweetness and delicacy of touch and expression, and with an intense absorption in the music, which

communicated itself to even so small a listener as Madelon.

It would have been hard to say which of the two had the more enjoyment—she, as she sat motionless, her chin propped on her two hands, her brown eyes gazing into space, and a hundred dreamy fancies vaguely shaped by the music, flitting through her brain; or he, as he bent over his violin, lovingly exacting the sweet sounds, and his thoughts—who knows where?—anywhere, one may be sure, rather than in the low-ceiled, dusty garret, redolent of tobacco smoke, and not altogether free from a suspicion of onions.

“There, my child,” he would say at the end, “that is music—that is art! What I was playing before was mere rubbish—trash, unworthy of me and of my violin.”

“And why do you play it?” asks Madelon, simply.

“Ah! why, indeed?” said the violinist—“because one must live, my little Fräulein; and since they will play nothing else at the theatre, I must play it also, or I should be badly off.”

“You are not rich, then?” said Madelon.

“Rich enough,” he answered. “I gain enough to live upon, and I ask no more.”

“Why don’t you make money like papa?” says

Madelon; "then you could play what you liked, you know. We are very rich sometimes."

The old German screwed up his queer, kind, ugly face.

"It—it's not my way," he said drily. "As for money, I might have had plenty by this time, if I had not run away from home when I was a boy, because I preferred being a poor musician to a rich merchant. Money is not the only nor the best thing in the world, my little lady."

M. Linders apparently saw no danger to Madelon's principles in these new friendships, or else, perhaps, he was bent on carrying out his plan of letting her get used to things; at any rate, he did not interfere with her spending as much time as she liked with both painter and musician; and every day through the winter she grew fonder of the society of the old violinist. He was a lonely man, who lived with his music and his books, cared little for company, and had few friends; but he liked to see Madelon flitting about his dusky room, carrying with her bright suggestions of the youth, and gaiety, and hopefulness he had almost forgotten. He talked to her, taught her songs, played to her as much as she liked, and often gave her and her father orders for the theatre to which he belonged, where, with delight, she would recognise his familiar face as he

nodded and smiled at her from the orchestra. He instructed her, too, in music; made her learn her notes, and practise on the jangling old piano, and even, at her particular request, to scrape a little on the violin; but she cared most for singing, and for hearing him play and talk. She never felt shy or timid with him, and one day, at the end of a long rhapsody about German music and German composers, she asked him innocently enough—

“Who was Beethoven, and Mozart, and—and all those others you talk about? I never heard of them before.”

“Never before!” he cried, in a sort of comic amazement and dismay. “Here is a little girl who has lived half her life in Germany, who talks German, and yet never heard of Beethoven, nor of Mozart, nor of—of all those others! Listen, then—they were some of the greatest men that ever lived.”

And, indeed, Madelon heard enough about them after that; for delighted to have a small, patient listener, to whom he could rhapsodize as much as he pleased in his native tongue, the violinist henceforth lost no opportunity of delivering his little lectures, and would harangue for an hour together, not only about music and musicians, but about a thousand other things—a queer, high-flown, rambling jumble, often enough, which Madelon could not possibly

follow nor understand, but to which she nevertheless liked to listen. A safer teacher she could hardly have had; she gained much positive information from him, and when he got altogether beyond her, she remained impressed with the conviction that he was speaking from the large experiences of deep, mysterious wisdom and knowledge, and sat listening with a reverential awe, as to some strange, lofty strain, coming to her from some higher and nobler region than she could hope to attain to as yet, and of which she could in some sort catch the spirit, though she could not enter into the idea. At the same time there was a certain childlike vein running through all the old man's rambling talk, which made it, after all, not unsuited to meet the instinctive aspirations of a child's mind. With him love and veneration for greatness and beauty, in every form, amounted almost to a passion, which was still fresh and genuine, as in the lad to whom the realization of the word *blasé* seems the one incomprehensible impossibility of life. In the simple reverence with which he spoke of the great masters of his art, Madelon might have recognized the same spirit as that which animated the American; and as the artist had once uncovered at the name of Raffaele and Lionardo da Vinci, so did the musician figuratively bow down at the shrines of Handel, or Bach, or

Beethoven. From both these men, so different in other respects, the child began to learn the same lesson, which in all her life before she had never even heard hinted at.

All this, however, almost overtaxed our little Madelon's faculties, and it was not surprising that, as the winter wore on, a change gradually came over her. In truth, both intellect and imagination were being overstrained by the constant succession of new images, new ideas, new thoughts, that presented themselves to her. She by no means grew accustomed to churches—not in the sense, at any rate, which her father had hoped would be the result of his new system. It was not possible that she should, while so much remained that was mysterious and unexplained; she only wearied her small brain with the effort to find the explanation for all these new perplexities, which she felt must exist somewhere, though she could not find it; add to this, these long conversations, this music, with its strange, vague suggestions, and even the thousand novelties of the picturesque Italian life around her, not one of which was lost on her impressionable little mind, and we need not wonder that she began to suffer from an excitement that gathered in strength from day to day. She grew thin, morbid, nervous, ate almost nothing, and lost her usual vivacity, sit-

ting absorbed in dreamy fits, from which it was difficult to arouse her, and which were very different from the quiet, happy silence in which she used to remain contented by her father's side for hours. All night she was haunted with what she had seen by day in picture-galleries and churches. The heavenly creations of Fra Angelico or Sandro Botticelli, of Ghirlandaio or Raffaele, over which she had mused and pondered, re-produced themselves in dreams, with the intensity and reality of actual visions, and with accessories borrowed from all that, in her new life, had impressed itself most vividly on her imagination. Once more she would stand in the vast church, the censers swinging, the organ pealing overhead, round her a great throng of beatified adoring saints, with golden glories, with palms, and tall white lilies, and many-coloured garments; or pillars and arches would melt away, and she would find herself wandering through flower-enamelled grass, in fair rose-gardens of Paradise; or radiant forms would come gliding towards her through dark-blue skies; or the heavens themselves would seem to open, and reveal a blaze of glory, where, round a blue-robed, star-crowned Madonna, choirs of rapturous angels repeated the divine melodies she had heard faintly echoed in the violinist's dim little room. All day long these dreams clung to her, oppressing her with

their strange unreal semblance of reality, associating themselves with every glowing sunset, with every starry sky, till the pictures themselves that had suggested them looked pale by comparison.

She was, in fact, going through a mental crisis, such as, in other circumstances, and under fostering influences, has produced more than one small ecstatic enthusiast; the infant shining light of some Methodist conventicle; the saintly child visionary of some Catholic convent. But Madelon had no one to foster, nor to interpret for her these feverish visions, so inexplicable to herself, poor child! To the good-natured, careless, jovial American, she would not have even hinted at them for worlds, and not less carefully did she shun appealing to her father for sympathy. That contemptuous "*vraiment*" dwelt in her memory, not as a matter of resentment, but as something to be avoided henceforth at the cost of any amount of self-repression. She would sit leaning her languid little head on his shoulder; but when he anxiously asked her what ailed her, she could only reply, "I don't know, papa." And indeed she did not know; nor even if she had, could she have found the words with which to have explained it to him. It was, after all, the old German who won her confidence at last. There was, as we have said, something simple, genuine, homely about

the old man; a reminiscence, perhaps, of his homely Fatherland still clinging about him, after more than forty years of voluntary exile, which Madelon could well appreciate, though she could not have defined it; for a child judges more by instinct than reflection, and it was through no long process of reasoning that she had arrived at the certainty that she would be met here by neither contempt nor indifference. Moreover, his generally lofty and slightly incomprehensible style of conversation, and the endless stores of learning with which she had innocently accredited him, had surrounded him with that vague halo of wisdom and goodness, so dear to the hearts of children of larger as of smaller growth, and which they are so eager to recognize, that they do not always distinguish between the false and the true. From the very beginning of their acquaintance, it had occurred to Madelon that she might be able to gain some information on that subject, which her father had pronounced to be above her comprehension as yet; but which, on reflection, and encouraged by a Nanette's example, she felt quite sure she could understand if it were only explained to her. Twenty times had that still unanswered question trembled on her lips, but a shy timidity, not so much of her old friend as of the subject itself, which had become invested in her mind with a kind of

awful mystery, to which a hundred circumstances daily contributed, checked her at the moment of utterance.

One evening, however, she was sitting as usual at the window in the old man's room. The sun had set, the short twilight was drawing to a close, church bells were ringing, down in the city yellow lights were gleaming in windows here and there, above, the great sky rounded upward from a faint glow on the horizon through imperceptible gradations of tint, to pure depths of transparent blue overhead, where stars were beginning to flash and tremble; within, in the gloom, the musician sat playing a sacred melody of Spohr's, and as Madelon listened, some subtle affinity between this hour and the first one she had spent in the church touched her, and her eyes filled with sudden tears of painful ecstasy. As the old German ceased, she went up to him with an impulse that admitted of no hesitation, and, as well as she could, told him all that was in her mind—her dreams, her strange weird fancies, all that for the last few months had been haunting and oppressing her with its weight of mystery. "Papa said I could not understand," she said in conclusion, "but I think I could. Will you not explain it to me? Can you not tell me what it all means, and who—who is God?"

The German had heard in silence till then, but at this last question he started from his listening attitude.

“*Was—was—*” he stammered, and suddenly rising—“*Ach, mein Gott!*” he cried, with the familiar ejaculation, “to ask me!—to ask me!”

He walked twice up and down the room, as stirred by some hidden emotion, his head bowed, his hands behind his back, murmuring to himself, and then stopped where Madelon was standing by the window. She looked up, half trembling, into the rugged face bent over her. He was her priest for the moment, standing as it were between earth and heaven—her confessor, to whom she had revealed the poor little secrets of her heart; and she waited with a sort of awe for his answer.

“My child,” he said at length, looking down sadly enough into her eager, inquiring eyes, “when I was no older than thou art, I had a pious, gentle mother, at whose knee night and morning I said my prayers—and believed. If she were alive now, I would say, ‘Go to her, and she will tell thee of all these things’—but do not speak of them to me. Old Karl Wendler is neither good, nor wise, nor believing enough to instruct thee, an innocent child.”

He made this little speech very gently and solemnly; then turned away abruptly, took up his

hat, and left the room without another word. Madelon stood still for a minute baffled, repulsed, with a sort of bruised, sore feeling at her heart, and yet with a new sense of wondering pity, roused by something in his words and manner; then she too left the room, and through the darkness crept softly downstairs.

So ended this little episode with the violinist. Not that she did not visit and sit with him as much as before; the very next day, when she returned, rather shyly, upstairs, she found him sitting in the old place, with the old nod and smile to welcome her, but somehow he managed to put things on a different footing—he spared her his long metaphysical discourses, and talked to her more as the child that she was, laughing, joking, and telling her queer hobgoblin and fairy stories, some of which she knew before indeed, but which he related with a quaint simplicity and naïveté, which gave them a fresh charm for her; and under this new aspect of things, she brightened up, began to lose her fits of dreaminess, to chatter as in old times, and cheered many an hour of the musician's solitary life. The American artist, too, left Florence about this time for a visit to Rome; and during his absence the *atelier* was closed, and wandering through churches and picture galleries were exchanged for long ex-

cursions into the country with her father; by degrees dreams, fancies, visions floated away, and Madelon became herself again.

She had gone through a phase, and one not altogether natural to her, and which readily passed away with the abnormal conditions that had occasioned it. She was by no means one of those dreamy, thoughtful, often melancholy children who startle us by the precocious grasp of their intellect, by their intuitive perception of truths which we had deemed far above their comprehension. Madelon's precocity was of quite another order. In her quick, impulsive, energetic little mind there was much that was sensitive and excitable, little that was morbid or unhealthy. One might see that, with her, action would always willingly take the place of reflection; that her impulses would have the strength of inspirations; that she would be more ready to receive impressions than to reason upon them. Meditation, comparison, introspection, were wholly foreign to this little, eager, impetuous nature, however they might be forced upon it in the course of years and events; and with her keen sense of enjoyment in all glad outward influences, one might have feared that the realities of life present to her would too readily preclude any contemplation of its hidden possibilities, but for a lively, susceptible imagination, which would

surely intervene to prevent any such tendency being carried out to its too prosaic end. It was through appeals to her imagination and affection, rather than to her reason and intellect, that Madeleine could be influenced; and whatever large sympathies with humanity she might acquire through life, whatever aspirations after a high and noble ideal, whatever gleams of inspiration from the great beyond that lies below the widest, as well as the narrowest horizon, might visit her—all these would come to her, we may fancy, through the exercise of pure instincts and a sensitive imagination, rather than through the power of logical deduction from given causes.

From our small, ten-year-old Madelon, however, all this still lay hidden; for the present, the outward pressure, which had weighed too heavily on her little mind and brain, removed, she returned with a glad reaction to her old habits of thought and speech. Not entirely indeed; the education she had received, remained and worked; the “obstinate questionings,” an answer to which she had twice vainly sought, were unforgotten, and still awaited their reply. This little Madelon, to whom the golden gates had been opened, though ever so slightly—to whom the divine, lying all about her and within her, had been revealed, though ever so dimly—could never be quite the same as the little Madelon

who, careless and unthinking, had strayed into the great church that summer morning six months ago; but the child herself was as yet hardly conscious of this, and neither, we may be sure, was M. Linders, as with renewed cheerfulness, and spirits, and chatter, she danced along by his side under the new budding trees, under the fair blue skies.

It was soon after this, when the delicious promise of an early spring was brightening the streets and gardens of Florence, filling them with sunshine and flowers, that another shadow fell upon the brightness of Madelon's life, and one so dark and real, as to make all others seem faint and illusory by comparison. Her father had a serious illness. He had not been well all the winter; and one day, Madelon, coming down from the violinist's room, had been frightened almost out of her small wits at finding him lying back unconscious in a chair in their little *salon*. She called the old woman who acted as their servant to her assistance, and between them they had soon succeeded in restoring him to consciousness, when he had made light of it, saying it was merely a fit of giddiness, which would have passed off. He had refused to be alarmed, or to send for a doctor, even after a second and third attack of the same kind; but then a fever, which in the mild spring weather was lurking about, lying

in wait for victims, seized him, and laid him fairly prostrate.

His illness never took a really dangerous turn, but it kept him weak and helpless for some weary weeks, during which Madelon learnt to be a most efficient little nurse, taking turns with the old servant and with the violinist, who willingly came down from his upper regions to do all he could to help his little favourite. In some respects she, perhaps, made the best nurse of all, with her small skilful fingers, and entire devotion to her father. She had a curious courage, too, for such an inexperienced child, and the sense of an emergency was quite sufficient to make her conquer the horrible pang it gave her loving little heart to see her father lying racked with pain, unconscious, and sometimes delirious. She never failed to be ready when wanted; the doctor complimented her, and said jokingly that the little Signorina would make a capital doctor's assistant. Her German friend nodded approval, and, best of all, it was always to his Madelon that M. Linders turned in his most weary moments—from her that he liked to receive drinks and medicine; and she it was who, as he declared, arranged his pillows and coverings more comfortably than anyone else. In delirium he asked for her continually; his eyes sought her when she was not

in the room, and lighted up when she came with her little noiseless step to his bedside. The old German, who had had a strong dislike to, and prejudice against this man, took almost a liking for him, as he noted the great love existing between him and his little daughter.

The American did not return till M. Linders was nearly well again, and thinking of departure. Madelon was in despair at the idea of leaving Florence; it had been more like home to her than any place she had yet known, and it almost broke her heart to think of parting with her old German friend; but M. Linders was impatient to be gone. He wanted change of air, he said, after his illness; but, indeed, had other reasons which he proclaimed less openly, but which were far more imperative, and made him anxious to pay an earlier visit to Germany this year than was usual with him. Certain speculations, on the success of which he had counted, had failed, so that a grand *coup* at Homburg or Baden seemed no less necessary than desirable to set him straight again with the world, and he accordingly fixed on a day towards the end of April for their departure.

The American made a festive little supper the evening before in his *atelier*, but it was generally felt to be a melancholy failure, for not even the

artist's rather forced gaiety, nor M. Linders' real indifference, could enliven it. As for the old German, he sat there, saying little, eating less, and smoking a great deal; and Madelon at his side was speechless, only rousing herself later in the evening to coax him into playing once more all her favourite tunes. Everyone, except, perhaps, M. Linders, felt more or less sorry at the breaking up of a pleasant little society which had lasted for some months, and the violinist almost felt as if he were being separated from his own child. Madelon wished him good-bye that night, but she ran upstairs very early the next morning to see him once more before starting.

The old man was greatly moved; he was standing looking sadly out of the window when she came in, and when he saw her in her little travelling cloak, the tears began to run down his rugged old cheeks.

"God bless thee, my little one!" he said. "I shall miss thee sorely—but thou wilt not forget me?"

"Never, never!" cries Madelon, with a little sob, and squeezing the kind hands that held hers so tightly.

"And if I should never see thee again," said the German, in broken accents, "if—if—remember, I——" He hesitated and stammered, and M. Linders' voice was heard calling Madelon.

"I must go," she said, "papa is calling me; but I will never forget you—never; ah! you have been so good, so kind to me. See here," she said, unclosing one of her hands which she had kept tightly shut, and showing the little green and gold fish Horace Graham had given her years before, "I promised never to part with this, but I have nothing else—and—and I love you so much—will you have it?"

"No, no," said the old man, smiling and shaking his head, "keep thy promise, and thy treasure, my child; I do not require that to remind me of thee. Farewell!"

He put her gently out of the door as her father's step was heard coming upstairs, and closed it after her. She never did see him again, for he died in less than two years after their parting.

M. Linders went to Homburg, to Baden, to Wiesbaden, but he was no longer the man he had been before his illness; he won largely, indeed, at times, but he lost as largely at others, playing with a sort of reckless, feverish impatience, instead of with the steady coolness that had distinguished him formerly. Old acquaintance who met him said that M. Linders was a broken man, and that his best days were over: men who had been accustomed to bet on his success, shrugged their shoulders, and

sought for some steadier and luckier player to back; he himself, impatient of ill-luck, and of continual defeat in the scenes of his former triumphs, grew restless and irritable, wandered from place to place in search of better fortune and better health, and at length, at the end of a fortnight's stay at Wiesbaden, after winning a large sum at *rouge-et-noir*, and losing half of it the next day, announced abruptly that he was tired of Germany, and should set off at once for Paris. Madelon had noticed the alteration in her father less than anyone else perhaps; she was used to changes of fortune, and whatever he might feel he never showed it in his manner to her; outwardly, at least, this summer had appeared to her very similar to any preceding one, and she was too much accustomed to M. Linders' sudden moves, to find anything unusual in this one, although, dictated as it was by a caprice of weariness and disgust, it took them away from the German tables just at the height of the season. Once more, then, the two set out together, and towards the middle of August found themselves established in their old quarters in the Paris Hotel, where Madame Linders had died, and where Madame Lavaux still reigned head of the establishment.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

After five Years.

ONE evening, about three weeks after their arrival in Paris, Madelon was standing at a window at the end of the long corridor into which M. Linders' apartment opened; the moon was shining brightly, and she had a book in her hand, which she was reading by its clear light, stopping, however, every minute to gaze down into the front courtyard of the hotel, which lay beneath the window, quiet, almost deserted after the bustle of the day, and full of white moonlight and black shadows. Her father was out, and she was watching for his return, though it was now long past eleven o'clock.

There was nothing unusual on her part in this late vigil, for she was quite accustomed to sit up for her father, when he spent his evenings away from home; but there must have been something strange and forlorn-looking in the little figure standing there all alone at such an hour, for a gentleman, who had come in late from the theatre, paused as he was turning the key of the door before entering his room, looked at her once or twice, and,

after a moment's hesitation, walked up to the window. Madelon did not notice him till he was close behind her, and then turned round with a little start, dropping her book.

"I did not think it was you—" she began; then seeing a stranger, stopped short in the middle of her speech.

"I am afraid I have startled you," said the gentleman in English-French, but with a pleasant voice and manner, "and disappointed you too."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur," she answered, "I thought it was papa; I have been looking for him for so long," and she turned round to the window again.

It was five years since Horace Graham and Madeleine had spent an hour together in the courtyard at Chaudfontaine, so that it was not surprising that they did not at once recognise each other at this second unforeseen meeting; the young man, as well as the child, had then been of an age to which five years cannot be added without bringing with them most appreciable changes. For Graham, these years had been precisely that transition period in which a lad separates himself from the aggregate mass of youth, and stands forth in the world as a man in his own right, according to that which is in him. This tall, thin, brown young army doctor,

who has passed brilliant examinations, who is already beginning to be known favourably in the profession, whose name has appeared at the end of more than one approved article in scientific Reviews; who has travelled, seen something of Italy, Switzerland, Belgium; who for five years has been studying, thinking, living through youthful experiences and failures, and out-living some youthful illusions, cannot fail, one may be sure, to be a different personage, in many respects, from the fresh-hearted medical student who had sauntered away an idle Sunday amongst the woods and valleys round Chaudfontaine, and had looked with curious, half wondering eyes at the new little world disclosed to him at the hotel. As for our little Madelon, the small, round, pinafores child was hardly recognisable in this slim little girl, in a white frock, with brown hair that hung in short wayward tangling waves, instead of curling in soft ringlets all over her head; and yet Graham, who rarely forgot a face, was haunted by a vague remembrance of her eyes, with the peculiar look, half-startled, half-confiding, with which they met the first glance of strangers. Madelon's brown eyes were the greatest charm of a face which was hardly pretty yet, though it had the promise of beauty in after years; to liken them to those of some dumb, soft, dark-eyed animal is to

use a trite comparison; and yet there is, perhaps, no other that so well describes eyes such as these, which seem charged with a meaning beyond that which their owner is able to express in words, or is, perhaps, even conscious of. When seen in children, they seem to contain a whole prophecy of their future lives, and in Madelon they had probably a large share in the powers of attraction which she undoubtedly possessed; few could resist their mute appeal, which, child as she was, went beyond her own thought, and touched deeper sympathies than any she could yet have known.

There was a moment's silence after Madelon had spoken, and then she once more turned from the window with a disappointed air.

"Pardon, Monsieur," she said again, "but can you tell me what time it is? Is it past eleven?"

"It is more than half-past," said Graham, looking at his watch. "Have you been waiting here long?"

"Since ten o'clock," said Madelon, "papa said he would be in by ten. I cannot think where he can be."

"He has probably found something to detain him," suggested Graham.

"No," answered Madelon, rejecting this obvious

proposition; "for he had an appointment here; there is some one waiting for him now."

"Then he has perhaps come in without your knowing it?"

"I do not think so," said Madelon, "he would have called me; and besides, I should have seen him cross the courtyard. I saw you come in just now, Monsieur."

Nevertheless she left her station by the window, and moved slowly along the passage to their apartment; it was just opposite Graham's, and as she went in, leaving the door open, Horace, who had followed her without any very definite purpose, looked in. It was a tolerably large room, with a door to the left opening into a smaller apartment, Utrecht velvet chairs and sofa, a mantelpiece also covered with velvet, on which stood a clock, a tall looking-glass, and two lighted wax candles; a table in the middle with some packs of cards, and a liqueur bottle and glasses, and a bed on one side opposite the fireplace. The window looked on to a side street, noisy with the incessant rattling of vehicles, and so narrow that the numerous lighted interiors of the houses opposite were visible to the most casual observer. A smell of smoking pervaded the room, explained by the presence of a young man, who held a cigar in one hand, whilst he leaned

half out of the window, over the low iron balcony in front, shouting to some one in the street below. He looked round as Madelon came in, and slowly drew himself back into the room, exhibiting a lean, yellow face, surrounded with dishevelled hair, and ornamented by black unkempt beard and moustache.

“*Monsieur votre père* does not arrive apparently, Mademoiselle,” he said.

“I have not seen him come in, Monsieur,” answered Madelon; “I thought he was perhaps here.”

“Not at all, I have seen nothing of him this evening. But this is perhaps a trick that Monsieur le Papa is playing me; he fears to give me his little revenge of which he spoke, and wishes to keep out of my way. What do you say to that, Mademoiselle?”

“I am quite sure it is not so,” answered Madelon, with a little defiant air. “I heard papa say it was quite by chance he had lost all that money to you, for you did not understand the first principles of the game.”

“Ah! he said that? But it is lucky for us other poor devils that we have these chances sometimes! You will at least admit that, Mademoiselle?”

“Papa plays better than anyone,” says Madelon,

retreating from argument to the safer ground of assertion, and still standing in the middle of the room in her defiant attitude, with her hands clasped behind her.

“Without a doubt, Mademoiselle; but then, as he says, we also have our chances. Well, I cannot wait for mine this evening, for it is nearly midnight, and I have another appointment. These gentlemen will wonder what has become of me. Mademoiselle, I have the honour to wish you good evening.”

He made a profound bow, and left the room.

Madelon gave a great sigh, and then came out into the passage again where Horace was standing. He had been a somewhat bewildered spectator of this queer little interview, but the child evidently saw nothing out of the way in it, for she made no remark upon it, and only said rather piteously,

“I cannot imagine where papa can be; I do wish he would come back.”

“Does he often stay out so late as this?” asked Graham.

“Oh! yes, often, but not when he says he is coming in early, or when he is expecting anyone.”

“And do you know where he is gone?”

“No, not at all. He said he was going to dine with some gentlemen, but I don’t know where! Oh!

do you think anything—anything can have happened?” cried Madelon, her hidden anxiety suddenly finding utterance.

“Indeed I do not,” answered Graham, in his kindest voice. “His friends have persuaded him to stay late, I have no doubt; you must not be so uneasy—these things often happen, you know. Let us go and look out of the window again; perhaps we shall see him just coming in.”

They went to the end of the corridor accordingly; but no one was to be seen, except the man who had just left M. Linders’ apartment walking briskly across the moonlight space below, the great doors of the *porte-cochère* closing after him with a clang that resounded through the silent courtyard. Graham had nothing further to say in the way of consolation; he could think of no more possible contingencies to suggest, and, indeed, it was useless to go on reasoning concerning perfectly unknown conditions. Madelon, however, seemed a little reassured by his confident tone, and he changed the subject by asking her whether the gentleman who had just left was a friend of hers.

“Who? Monsieur Legros?” Madelon answered. “No, I don’t know him much, and I do not like him at all; he comes sometimes to play with papa.”

“To play with him?”

“Yes, at cards, you know—at *écarté*, or *piquet*, or one of those games.”

“And it was with him that your father had an appointment?”

“Yes,” said Madelon; “he came last night, and papa told him to be here again this evening at ten, and that is why I cannot think why he does not come.”

She turned again disconsolately to the window, and there was another pause. Madelon relapsed into the silence habitual to her with strangers, and Graham hardly knew how to continue the conversation; yet he was unwilling to leave the child alone with her anxiety at that late hour: and besides, he was haunted by vague, floating memories that refused to shape themselves definitely. Some time—somewhere—he had heard or seen, or dreamt of some one—he could not catch the connecting link which would serve to unite some remote, foregone experience with his present sensations.

He moved a little away from the window, and in so doing his foot struck against the book which Madelon had dropped on first seeing him, and he stooped to pick it up. It was a German story-book, full of bright coloured pictures; so he saw as he opened it and turned over the leaves, scarcely thinking of what he did, when his eye was sud-

denly arrested by the inscription on the fly-leaf. The book had been given to Madelon only the year before by a German lady she had met at Chaudfontaine, and there was her name, "Madeleine Linders," that of the donor, the date, and below, "Hôtel des Bains, Chaudfontaine." It was a revelation to Horace. Of course he understood it all now. Here was the clue to his confused recollections, to the strange little scene he had just witnessed. Another moonlit courtyard came to his remembrance, a gleaming, rushing river, a background of shadowy hills, and a little coy, wilful, chattering girl, with curly hair and great brown eyes—those very eyes that had been perplexing him not ten minutes ago.

"I think you and I have met before," he said to Madelon, smiling; "but I daresay you don't remember much about it, though I recollect you very well now."

"We have met before?" said Madelon. "Pardon, Monsieur, but I do not very well recall it."

"At Chaudfontaine, five years ago, when you were quite a little girl. You are Madeleine Linders, are you not?"

"Yes, I am Madeleine Linders," she answered. "I have often been to Chaudfontaine; did you stay at the hotel there?"

“Only for one night,” said Graham; “but you and I had a long talk together in the courtyard that evening. Let me see, how can I recall it to you? Ah! there was a little green and gold fish——”

“Was that you?” cried Madelon, her face suddenly brightening with a flush of intelligence and pleasure. “I have it still, that little fish. Ah! how glad I am now that I did not give it away! That gentleman was so kind to me, I shall never forget him. But it was you!” she added, with a sudden recognition of Graham’s identity.

“It was indeed,” he said laughing. “So you have thought of me sometimes since then? But I am afraid you would not have remembered me if I had not told you who I was.”

“I was such a little girl then,” said Madelon colouring. “Five years ago—why I was not six years old; but I remember you very well now,” she added, smiling up at him. “I have often thought of you, Monsieur, and I am so glad to see you again.”

She said it with a little naïve air of frankness and sincerity which was very engaging, giving him her hand as she spoke.

“I am glad you have not quite forgotten me,” said Graham, sitting down by her on the window

seat; "but indeed you have grown so much, I am not sure I should have recollected you, if I had not seen your name here. What have you been doing ever since? Have you ever been to Chaudfontaine again?"

"Oh, very often," said Madelon. "We go there almost every year for a little while—not this year though, for we were at Wiesbaden till three weeks ago, and then papa had to come to Paris at once."

"And do you still go about everywhere with your papa, or do you go to school sometimes?"

"To school? oh no, never," said Madelon, not without some wonder at the idea. "Papa would not send me to school. I should not like it at all, and neither would he. I know he would not get on at all well without me, and I love travelling about with him. Last winter we were in Italy."

"And you never come to England?"

"No, never. I asked papa once if he would not go there, and he said no, that we should not like it at all, it was so cold and *triste* there, one never amused one's-self."

"But I thought you had some relations there," said Graham. "Surely I saw an uncle with you who was English?"

"Oh yes, Uncle Charles; but he never went to

England either, and he died a long time ago. I don't know of any other relations."

"So you never talk English now, I suppose? Do you remember telling me to speak English, because I spoke French so funnily?"

"No," said Madelon, colouring and laughing. "How is it possible I can have been so rude, Monsieur? I think you speak it very well. But I have not forgotten my English, for I have some books, and often we meet English or American gentlemen, so that I still talk it sometimes."

"And German too," said Horace, looking at her book.

"Yes, and Italian; I learnt that last winter at Florence. We meet a great many different people, you know, so I don't forget."

"And you are always travelling about?"

"Yes, always; I should not like to live in one place, I think, and papa would not like it either, he says. Do you remember papa, Monsieur?"

"Very well," said Graham; and indeed he recalled perfectly the little scene in the *salle-à-manger* of the Chaudfontaine hotel—the long dimly lighted room, the two men playing at cards, and the little child nestling close up to the fair one whom she called papa. "Yes, I remember him very well," he added, after a moment's pause.

"How strange that you should see us here again!" said Madelon. "Did you know we were staying in the hotel, Monsieur?"

"Not at all," answered Horace, smiling. "I only arrived yesterday, and had no notion that I should find an old acquaintance to welcome me."

"How fortunate that I was waiting here, and that you saw my name in that book," said Madelon, evidently looking on the whole as a great event, brought about by a more remarkable combination of circumstances than everyday life as a rule afforded. "Without that you would not have known who I was, perhaps? Papa will be very glad to see you again. Ah, how I wish he would come!" she added, all her anxieties suddenly revived.

"Do you always sit up for him when he is so late?" said Graham. "Surely it would be wiser for you to go to bed."

"That is just what I said to Mademoiselle an hour ago," said a kind, cheery voice behind them, belonging to Madame Lavaux, the mistress of the hotel. "Of what use, I say, is it for her to sit up waiting for her papa, who will not come any the sooner for that."

"Ah! Madame, I must wait," said Madelon. "Papa will come soon."

"But, *ma chère petite*—" began Madame.

"I must wait," repeated Madelon, piteously; "I always sit up for him."

Graham thought he could not do better than leave her in the hands of the landlady, and with a friendly good-night, and a promise to come and see her the next day, he went back to his own room. In a few minutes, he heard Madame pass along the corridor and go upstairs to bed; but, though tired enough himself after a day of Paris sight-seeing, he could not make up his mind to do the same, when, on opening his door, he saw Madelon standing where he had left her. He could not get rid of the thought of this lonely little watcher at the end of the passage, and taking up a book he began to read. From time to time he looked out, but there was no change in the posture of affairs; through the half-open door opposite he could see the lights burning in the still empty room, and the small figure remained motionless at the moonlit window. All sounds of life and movement were hushed in the hotel, all the clocks had long since struck midnight, and he was considering whether he should not go and speak to Madelon again, when he heard a faint cry, and then a rush of light feet along the passage and down the staircase.

"So he has come at last," thought Graham, laying down his book with a sense of relief, not

sorry to have his self-imposed vigil brought to an end. He still sat listening, however; his door was ajar, and he thought he should hear the father and child come up together. There was a moment's silence as the sound of the footsteps died away, and then succeeded a quick opening and shutting of doors, the tread of hasty feet, a confusion of many voices speaking at once, a sudden clamour and stir breaking in on the stillness, and then suddenly subdued and hushed, as if to suit the prevailing quiet of the sleeping house.

"Something must have happened," thought Graham. "That poor child!—perhaps her father has, after all, met with some accident!" He left his room and ran quickly downstairs. The confused murmur of voices grew louder as he approached the hall, and on turning the last angle of the staircase, he at once perceived the cause of the disturbance.

A little group was collected in the middle of the hall, the night porter, one or two of the servants of the hotel, and some men in blouses, all gathered round a tall prostrate man, half lying on a bench placed under the centre lamp, half supported by two men, who had apparently just carried him in. He was quite insensible, his head had fallen forward on his breast, and was bound with a handkerchief that had been tied round to staunch the blood from

a wound in his forehead; his neckcloth was unfastened and his coat thrown back to give him more air. The little crowd was increasing every moment, as the news spread through the house; the *portecochère* stood wide open, and outside in the street a *fiacre* could be seen, standing in the moonlight.

"A doctor must be fetched at once," someone was saying, just as Horace came up and recognized, not without difficulty, in the pale disfigured form before him, the handsome fair-haired M. Linders he had met at Chaudfontaine five years before.

"I am a doctor," he said, coming forward. "Perhaps I can be of some use here."

No one seemed to notice him at first—a lad had already started in quest of a surgeon, and jumping into the empty *fiacre* that had brought the injured man to the hotel, was driving off; but Madelon turned round at the sound of Graham's voice, and looked up in his face with a new expression of hope in her eyes, instead of the blank, bewildered despair with which she had been gazing at her father and the strange faces around. To the poor child it seemed as if she had lived through an unknown space of terror and misery during the few minutes that had elapsed since from the passage window she had seen the *fiacre* stop, and, with the presentiment of evil which had been haunting her during these last hours

of suspense, intensified to conviction, had flown downstairs only to meet her father's insensible form as he was carried in. She was kneeling now by his side, and was chafing one of his cold hands between her poor little trembling fingers; but when she saw Graham standing at the edge of the circle she got up, and went to him.

"Will you come to papa?" she said, taking him by both hands and drawing him forward.

"Don't be frightened," said Horace, in his kind, cheerful voice, trying to encourage her, for her face and lips were colourless, and she was trembling as with a sudden chill. He put one arm round her, and came forward to look at M. Linders.

"Allow me," he said; and this time his voice commanded attention, and imposed a moment's silence on the confusion of tongues. "I am a doctor, and can perhaps be of some use; but I must beg of you not to press round in this way. Can any one tell me what has happened?" he added, as he bent over M. Linders.

"It was an accident, Monsieur," said a man of the working-class, standing by, "this poor gentleman must have had some kind of fit, I think. I was crossing the Boulevards with him about ten o'clock; there were a good many carriages about, but we were going quietly enough, when suddenly I saw

him stop, put his hand to his head, and fall down in the road. I had to run just then to get safely across myself, and when I reached the other side, I saw a great confusion, and heard that a carriage had driven straight over him."

There was a moment's pause, and Madelon said in a tremulous whisper, "Papa used to have *vertiges* last winter, but he got quite well again."

"To be sure," said Graham; "and so we must hope he will now. That was more than two hours ago," he said, turning to the man—"what have you been doing ever since?"

"We carried him into the nearest *café*, Monsieur, and some proposed taking him to a hospital, but after a time we found a letter in his pocket addressed to this hotel, and we thought it best to bring him here, as he might have friends; so we got a *fiacre*. But it was a long way off, and we were obliged to come very slowly."

"A hospital would perhaps have been the better plan," said Graham; "or you should have found a doctor before moving him. However, now he must be carried upstairs without further delay. My poor child," he said, turning to Madelon, "you can do no good here—you had better go with Madame, who will take care of you; will you not, Madame?"

he added, turning to the landlady, who, roused from her bed, had just appeared, after a hasty toilette.

“Yes, yes, she can come with me,” said Madame Lavaux, who was not in the best of tempers at the disturbance; “but I beg of you not to make more noise than you can help, Messieurs, or I shall have the whole house disturbed, and half the people leaving to-morrow.”

The sad little procession moved quietly enough up the stairs, and along the corridor to M. Linders' room. Graham had gone on in front, but Madame Lavaux had held back Madelon when she would have pressed forward by the side of the men who were carrying her father, and she had yielded at first in sheer bewilderment. She had passed through more than one phase of emotion in the course of the last ten minutes, poor child! The first overwhelming shock and terror had passed away, when Graham's reassuring voice and manner had convinced her that her father was not dead; but she had still felt too stunned and confused to do more than obey passively, as she watched him carefully raised, and slowly carried from the hall. By the time they reached the top of the staircase, however, her natural energy began to reassert itself; and, as she saw him disappear within the bedroom, her impatient eagerness to be at his side again, could not be restrained.

His recent illness was still too fresh a memory for the mere sight of his present suffering and insensibility to have any of the terrors of novelty, after the first shock was over, and all her former experiences went to prove that his first words on recovering consciousness would be to ask for her. Her one idea was that she must go at once and nurse him; she had not heeded, nor, perhaps, even heard Graham's last words, and she was about to follow the men into the bedroom, when Madame Lavaux interposed to prevent her.

"Run upstairs to my room, *petite*," she said; "you will be out of the way there, and I will come to you presently."

"No," said Madelon, refusing point-blank, "I am going with papa."

"But it is not possible, my child; you will only be in the way. You heard what M. le Docteur said?"

"I *will* go to papa!" cries Madelon, trembling with agitation and excitement; "he will want me, I know he will, I am never in his way! You have no right to prevent my going to him, Madame! Let me pass, I say," for Madame Lavaux was standing between her and the door of the room into which M. Linders had been carried.

"*Allons donc*, we must be reasonable," says Ma-

dame. "Your papa does not want you now, and little girls should do as they are told. If you had gone to bed an hour ago, as I advised, you would have known nothing about all this till to-morrow. Eh, these children! there is no doing anything with them; and these men," she continued, with a sigh, "the noise they make with their great boots! and precisely Madame la Comtesse, *au premier*, had an *attaque des nerfs* this evening, and said the house was as noisy as a barrack—but these things always happen at unfortunate moments!"

No one answered this little speech, which, in fact, was addressed to no one in particular. It was, perhaps, not altogether Madame Lavaux' fault that through long habit her instincts as the proprietor of a large hotel had ended by predominating so far over her instincts as a woman as always to come to hand first. The nice adjustment between the claims of conscience and the claims of self-interest, between the demands of her bills and the demands of never-satisfied, exacting travellers, alone involved a daily recurring struggle, in which the softer emotions would have been altogether out of place, we may suppose. In the present instance she considered it a hard case that her house should be turned topsy-turvy at such an untimely hour, and its general propriety endangered thereby; and Madelon's grief,

which at another time would have excited her compassion, had for the moment taken the unexpected form of determined opposition, and could only be looked upon as another element of disturbance. Madelon herself, however, who could hardly be expected to regard her father's accident with a view to those wider issues that naturally presented themselves to Madame Lavaux, simply felt that she was being cruelly ill-used. She had not attended to a word of this last speech, but nevertheless she had detected the want of sympathy, and it by no means increased her desire to accede to Madame's wishes.

"I *will* go to papa," she repeated, the sense of antagonism that had come uppermost gaining strength and vehemence from the consciousness of the underlying grief and sore trouble that had aroused it, "or I will stay here if you will not let me pass; rather than go away I will stand here all night."

Graham had heard nothing of this little altercation, but now coming out of the bed-room to speak to Madame Lavaux, he found a most determined little Madelon standing with her hands clasped behind her, and her back set firmly against the wall, absolutely refusing to retreat.

She sprang forward, however, as soon as she saw him.

"I may go to papa now, may I not?" she cried.

"Mademoiselle wants to go to her papa," says Madame, at the same moment, "I beg of you, Monsieur, to tell her it is impossible, and that she had better come with me. She asserts that her father will want her."

"That is all nonsense," said Graham hastily; "of course she cannot come in now," then noticing Madelon's poor little face, alternately white, and flushed with misery and passion, he said, "Listen to me, Madelon; you can do your father no good now. He would not know you, my poor child, and you would only be in the way. But I promise you that by-and-by you shall see him."

"By-and-by," said Madelon; "how soon?"

"As soon as we can possibly manage it."

Nothing, perhaps, would have induced Madelon at that moment to have given into Madame Lavaux' unsupported persuasions, but she yielded at once to Horace; indeed her sudden passion had already died away at the sight of his face, at the sound of the kind voice which she had somehow begun to associate with a sense of help and protection. She did not quite give up her point even now, however.

"I need not go upstairs," she said, with trembling

lips and tears in her eyes. "I may go into my own room, may I not?"

"Your room? Which is that?" asked Graham.

"This one—next to papa," she said, pointing to the door that led into the passage.

"Yes, you can stay there if you like; but don't you think you would be better with Madame Lavaux, than all by yourself in there?"

"No, I would rather stay here," she answered, and then pausing a moment at the door, "I may come and see him presently?" she added wistfully, "I always nursed him when he was ill before."

"I am sure you are a very good little nurse," said Graham kindly, "and I will tell you when you may come; but it will not be just yet. So the best thing you can do will be to go to bed, and then you will be quite ready for to-morrow."

He had no time to say more, for his services were required. He gave Madelon a candle, closed the door that communicated between the two rooms, and she was left alone.

CHAPTER II.

A Farewell Letter.

MADOLON was left alone to feel giddy, helpless, bewildered in the reaction from strong excitement and passion. She was quite tired and worn-out, too, with her long watching and waiting; too weary to cry even, or to think over all that had happened.

She did not go to bed, however; that would have been the last thing she would have thought of doing; for, Graham's last words notwithstanding, she had a notion that in a few minutes she would be called to come and watch by her father, as she had often done in the old days at Florence; so she only put down her candle on the table, and curled herself up in a big arm-chair; and in five minutes, in spite of her resolution to keep wide awake till she should be summoned, she was sound asleep.

Low voices were consulting together in the next room, people coming in and out; the French doctor who had been sent for arriving; cautious footsteps, and soft movements about the injured man. But Madelon heard none of them, she slept soundly on,

and only awoke at last to see her candle go out with a splutter, and the grey light of dawn creeping chilly into the room. She awoke with a start and shiver of cold, and sat up wondering to find herself there; then a rush of recollections came over her of last night, of her father's accident, and she jumped up quickly, straightening herself, stretching her little stiff limbs, and pushing back her tumbled hair with both hands from the sleepy eyes that were hardly fairly open even now.

Her first movement was towards the door between the two bedrooms, but she checked herself, remembering that Monsieur le Docteur had told her she must not go in there till she was called. There was another door to her room leading into the corridor, and just at that moment she heard two people stop outside it, talking together in subdued tones.

"Then I leave the case altogether in your hands," says a strange man's voice. "I am absolutely obliged to leave Paris for B—— by the first train this morning, and cannot be back till to-morrow night; so, as you say, Monsieur, you are in Paris for some time——"

"For the next few days, at any rate," answered the other; and Madelon recognized Graham's voice and English accent, "long enough to see this case through to the end, I am afraid."

“If anything can be done, you will do it, I am sure,” interrupted the other with warmth. “You must permit me to say, Monsieur, as an old man may say to a young *confrère*, that it is seldom one meets with so much coolness and skill in such a very critical case. Nothing else could have saved——”

The voices died away as the speakers walked towards the end of the passage. Madelon had hardly taken in the sense of the few sentences she had heard; she was only anxious now to see Graham and ask if she might go to her father, so she opened her door softly and crept into the passage, meeting Horace as he returned towards the sick-room after seeing the French doctor off. He looked down on the little figure all pale and ruffled in the cold grey light.

“Why, I thought you were asleep,” he said. “Would you like to see your father now? You may come in, but you must be very quiet, for he is dozing.”

“Then he is better?” said Madelon, anxiously.

Graham did not answer, he opened the door and led her in. The room looked cheerless with the shaded night-lamp casting long shadows, which mingled with those that the growing daylight was chasing away. M. Linders was lying with his head supported on a heap of pillows: his forehead was

bandaged where the deep cut had been given just above the brow, and he looked deadly pale; his eyes were closed, he was breathing heavily, and Madelon thought that, as Graham had told her, he was asleep; but it was, in fact, rather a kind of stupor, from which louder noises than the sound of her soft footfall would have failed to rouse him. She went on tiptoe up to his bedside, and stood gazing at him for a moment, and then with a swift, silent movement buried her face in her hands, and burst into an agony of crying.

“He is very ill—oh! is he going to die?” was all the answer she could give in a hoarse whisper to Graham’s attempts at comfort, trying the while to smother her sobs, so that they might not break out and wake her father.

“I hope not—I hope not,” said Horace, quite grieved at the sight of her distress; “but you must not cry so, Madelon; how are you to nurse him and help him to get well again if you do?”

She stopped sobbing a little at this, and tried to check her tears.

“Do you really think he will get well again?” she said; “he looks so ill.”

Graham did not at once answer. In truth, he saw no prospect of M. Linders’ ultimate recovery, though he would probably regain consciousness,

and might, perhaps, linger on for a few days. But there always remained the hope born of a determination not to despair, and it seemed cruel, at that moment, not to share it with our poor little Madelon.

"We must hope so," he said at last, "we must always hope for the best, you know; but he must be kept very quiet, so you and I, Madelon, must do our best to watch him, and see that he is not disturbed."

"Yes," said Madelon, drying her eyes quite now. "I will take care of him."

"Very well, then, if you will sit with him now, I will go and speak to Madame Lavaux, if she is up; there are several arrangements I have to make."

He went away, leaving Madelon contented for the moment, since she could sit and watch by her father; she remained motionless, her eyes fixed on his face, her hands clasped round her knees, her whole mind so absorbed in keeping perfectly quiet, the one thing she could do for him just then, that she hardly ventured to breathe. But not even yet did she understand the full meaning of what had happened, nor clearly comprehend all that she had to dread. She was not really afraid that her father would not recover; she knew indeed that he was very ill, much worse than he had ever been at

Florence, and that it might be a long, long time before he would be well again, but she did not think that he was going to die. She had asked the question indeed, prompted by an instinctive terror that had seized her, but in fact she hardly knew what death meant, much less had she ever conceived of her father as dead, or imagined life without him. Nevertheless, the sudden panic had left a nameless, unrecognized fear lurking somewhere, which gave an added intensity to her desire that he would wake up and speak to her once more; and sometimes the beating of her own heart seemed to deafen her, so that she could not hear the sound of his heavy irregular breathing, and then nothing but the dread of disturbing him could have prevented her from jumping up and going to him to make sure that he was still sleeping. When would he awaken and look at her and speak to her again? It appeared so long since she had heard his voice, and seen him smile at her; since he had wished her good-bye the evening before, she seemed to have lived through such long hours of unimagined terror and sorrow, and all without being able to turn to him for the sure help, for the loving protection and sympathy that had ever been ready for his little Madelon; and even now, he did not know how she was watching him, nor how she was longing to go to him and

kiss him, to put her arms round his neck, and lay her soft little cheek caressingly against his. This thought was the most grievous of all to Madelon just then, and the big tears came into her eyes again, and fell slowly one by one into her lap.

Graham, however, returning presently, somehow seemed to bring courage and consolation with him. Madelon brightened up at once when he sat down by her and told her that he had asked Madame Lavaux to send them up some coffee, so that they might have it together there; and then, seeing the tears on her sad little face, he assured her in his kind way that her father would wake up presently and speak to her, and that, in the meantime, she need not sit quite so still, as she would not disturb him if she moved about quietly; and when, by-and-by, the *café-au-lait* arrived, they had their little meal together, whilst he told her in a low voice how her father had partially recovered his consciousness in the night and asked for her, but had been quite satisfied when he heard she had gone to bed, and had afterwards gone off to sleep as Madelon saw him now.

“By-the-by, Madelon,” Graham said presently, “tell me if you have any relations living in Paris, or any friends that you go and visit sometimes?”

"No," says Madelon wondering, "I have no relations—only papa."

"No uncles, or aunts, or cousins?"

"No," said Madelon again, "only Uncle Charles, who died, you know."

"Ah, yes—that was an English uncle; but your papa, has he no brothers or sisters in Paris, or anywhere else?"

"I never heard of any," said Madelon, to whom this idea of possible relations seemed quite a new one. "I never go to visit anyone."

"Then you have no friends living in Paris—no little companions, no ladies who come to see you?"

"No," answers Madelon, shaking her head, "we don't know anyone in Paris, except some gentlemen who come to play with papa—like Monsieur Legros, you know—only some are nicer than he is; but I don't know the names of them all. At Wiesbaden I knew a Russian princess, who used to ask me to go and see her at the hotel—oh, yes, and a German Countess, and a great many people that we met at the tables and at the balls, but I daresay I shall never see them again; we meet so many people, you know."

"And you have no other friends?"

"Oh, yes," said Madelon, her eyes shining suddenly, "there was the American artist, who lived in our house in Florence, and the old German who

taught me to sing and play the violin; I was very fond of him, he was so good—so good.”

“Who were they?” asked Graham.

Madelon explained, not in the least understanding the purport of all these questions, but her explanation did not help Graham much. In truth, he was revolving some anxious thoughts. In accepting the charge of this sick man, he felt that he had incurred a certain responsibility, not only towards M. Linders, but towards his little girl, and any relations or friends that he might have. It was on Madelon's account above all that he felt uneasy; what was to become of her if her father died—and Graham had little doubt that he was dying—all friendless and alone in the world as she would apparently be? Had any arrangements for the future been made, any provision left for her? What was to become of this poor child, clinging so closely to her father, and so dependent upon him that she seemed to have no thoughts nor ideas apart from him?

Graham had been questioning Madame Lavaux as to what she knew of M. Linders and his life, and had gained much information on some points, though very little on others. Madame Lavaux had readily related the history of Madelon's birth and Madame Linders' death. It was a story she was

fond of telling; it had been a little romance in the ordinary routine of hotel life, and one in which, when she had duly set forth M. Linders' heartlessness and her own exertions, she felt that she must shine in an exceptionally favourable light; and indeed it was so pitiful a tale that her hearers could not but share the indignation and compassion she felt and expressed when she spoke of *cette pauvre dame*, who so young and so beautiful had been left alone to give birth to her infant, and, still alone, to die four months later. But when Graham endeavoured to get any facts bearing directly upon the present emergency, he found Madame Lavaux less well-informed. M. Linders had come to her hotel year after year, she said, and she had always taken him in, on the little girl's account (who was a *chère petite*, though troublesome sometimes, as children would be); otherwise she would have been sorry to have such a *mauvais sujet* about the house, in and out at all hours, and queer-looking men sitting up with him half the night. Had he any relations or friends? That she did not know, she had never seen or heard of any, but she did not wonder at that—they did well to keep clear of him, a bad man, who had broken more hearts than his wife's, she would answer for it. For the rest, she knew little about him, she added, with a sudden fit of professional reticence,

induced by the recollection that it might be as well not to gossip too much about the affairs of her *clientèle*; he came and went, paid his bill regularly enough, generally seemed to have money at his command, and of course it was not for her to inquire how he got it, though she might have her suspicions. What was to become of his little girl in case of his death? Madame had never thought of that: did Monsieur think he was going to die? In that case how much better to have taken him to the hospital; a death in the house was always so inconvenient and disagreeable—not that she had grudged it to that *pauvre* Madame Linders, but this was a different thing altogether; would he certainly die? Monsieur said he did not know, one must always hope, but the case was a grave one, and seeing that Madame could give him no help he left her.

He had questioned Madeleine in the hope that she would be able to tell him of some one for whom he could send, or to whom he could at least write, but here again he was baffled, and he could only wait now for the moment when M. Linders should recover consciousness.

The hotel was all astir by this time with life and movement, doors opening and shutting, footsteps up and down the staircases and corridors, voices talking, calling, grumbling, downstairs eating and drink-

ing going on with much clattering of plates and dishes, fiacres and omnibuses driving up, tourists setting off in gay parties for their day's sight-seeing, luggage being moved, travellers coming, travellers going, to England, to the north, to the south, to the ends of the earth—all the busy restless hotel life going on except in this one silent room, where two people sat very quietly watching a third, who, as one of them foresaw sadly enough, would never take part in all this stir and bustle of life again. Outside was broad sunny daylight now, but within it was all dim and cool, for the night had been hot, and the window stood wide open, and now the morning air blew freshly through the Venetian shutters, that were closed to darken the room and shut out the sun, which later would shine full upon them. The morning hours slipped away; there was nothing to be done while M. Linders remained in this state, and Madelon, by Horace's advice, took a book, and seated herself on a low stool by the window to read. Now and then she would stand looking at her father with a most pitiful yearning in her great brown eyes; once or twice, M. Linders, in his dull slumber, half torpor, half sleep, seemed in some sort conscious of her presence; he moved his head uneasily, said "Madeleine," and then some low muttered words which she could not catch, but

he never quite roused up, and after each throb of expectation and hope, she could only return to her book, and her silent watching.

Graham went in and out, or sat reading and writing at the table, and at twelve o'clock he made Madelon go downstairs to breakfast with Madame Lavaux in her own little sitting-room. Madame, who was really very fond of her, had forgotten all about the altercation of the night before. Indeed she was both good-natured and kind-hearted as soon as she could allow her better impulses to have their own way; but she was a little apt, as are most people to whom life resolves itself into a narrow ministering to their personal pains and pleasures, to look upon untoward occurrences as evidence of the causeless animosity of some vague impersonality, continually on the watch to adjust the largest events of life so as to occasion her particular inconvenience. If half Paris and its environs had been destroyed by an earthquake, her first impression of the catastrophe would very possibly have been that it could not have happened at a worse moment for raising the price of early asparagus, though the further reflection that the general want of accommodation would justify her in doubling her hotel tariff, might in some measure have restored her faith in the fitness of things. After this, she would have found time to be over-

whelmed with compassion for the sufferers. M. Linders' accident, she found, had, as yet, been attended with no evil results, so far as she was concerned; no one had been disturbed in the night, no one had left, so that, for the moment, it had been safely transferred to that region of abstract facts, which she could consider dispassionately, and judge by the light of her kindly impulses; and it was under the influence of these that she was now bent on petting and making much of Madelon, giving her cakes and confitures and all kinds of good things. On second thoughts she had rejected the idea that M. Linders was going to die; it would be so very troublesome and inconvenient, that she found it pleasanter to persuade herself that he would surely recover; and now, on the strength of this conviction, and with a kind wish to console Madelon, she became so encouraging, so certain he would be well again in a few weeks—in a few weeks did she say?—in a few days—with this clever English doctor, who, as she improvised for the occasion, everyone knew was one of the first doctors in London—with all this Madame so encouraged and cheered our Madelon, that she came upstairs again at the end of an hour looking quite bright, and almost expecting to see some wonderful change for the better in her father. M. Linders, however still lay

as she had left him, and perhaps the sight of his pale bloodless face chilled her, for she crept silently to her corner, and took up her book again, without saying a word of her new hopes. Presently Graham, looking up from his writing, found that she had done the best thing possible under the circumstances, for, with her book lying open upon her lap, and her head resting against the window-frame, she had fallen fast asleep. He went up to her, raised her gently in his arms, and carried her into her own room; so perfectly sound asleep was she, that she hardly stirred, even when he laid her on her bed; and then, drawing the curtain round her, he left her to herself.

If this long morning had passed slowly and sadly for our sorrowful little Madelon, it had been a time of anxiety and uneasiness enough for Horace Graham also; who had never, I daresay, felt more nervous than during these quiet hours when M. Linders, partly from the effects of his accident, partly from the opiates that had been given him, lay unconscious. He was young in his profession, and though clever and skilled enough in the technical part, he had had little experience in what may be called the moral part of it, and he positively shrank from the moment when this man, of whose life and character he knew something, should wake

up, and he should have to tell him that he was dying. It was so absolutely necessary, too, that he should know the danger he was in; for if, as was too probable from his mode of life, his affairs were in disorder, and his arrangements for his child's future had still to be made, the time that remained to him was in all human probability but short. For the rest, Graham felt in himself small capacity for preaching or exhortation, and indeed from a professional point of view, he dreaded a possible outburst of excitement and remorse, as lessening his last chance of saving his patient's life; and yet to him—young, full of energy, and hope, and resolution, though no nearer perfection and tried wisdom than any other man with crude beliefs and enthusiasms and untested powers for good or evil—to him death still appeared one of the most awful facts in life, and he could not think unmoved of the task of announcing to such a man as this, that his last chances were over, and such life as one can live in this world was for him a thing of the past for ever now. Not a twelvemonth later, Graham had stood by so many dying men, had listened to so many dying speeches, had seen death met in so many forms, and with such strange variety of character, with indifference or calmness, or resignation, with wild triumph, or wilder remorse, that he looked back with

a sort of wonder on his present inexperience and perplexity. Not the less, however, did he now sit framing a dozen speeches one after the other, dreading the effect of saying too much, and fearing to say too little, till, about an hour after Madelon had fallen asleep, M. Linders at length stirred, opened his eyes, and tried to move.

Graham was at his side instantly, and the sick man gazed up at him in silence for a moment.

"What has happened?" he said at last in a feeble voice: "who are you? where is Madelon?"

"Madelon is in the next room asleep," answered Graham; "you met with an accident last night—I am an English doctor staying in the hotel—the French one had to leave—do you remember?"

He paused between each sentence, and M. Linders' eyes, which were fixed upon him as he spoke, gradually acquired an expression of intelligence as memory returned to him. He closed them again and turned away his head.

"Yes, I remember something about it," he said, "but—*que diable*—I cannot move a limb; am I much hurt?"

"A good deal," said Graham, helping him to raise himself a little. "You had better keep quiet, and take this," giving him a cordial, as M. Linders sank back exhausted.

"That is better," he said, after a few minutes of struggling breathing. "So I am a good deal hurt? Am I—am I going to die by chance, M. le Docteur?"

He spoke in his old half-sarcastic, half-cynical way, but with a feeble, gasping voice, that made an effect of contrast, as of the tragic face espied behind the grinning mask. Somehow it touched Graham, burdened as he was with the consciousness of the death-warrant he had to pronounce, and he paused before answering. M. Linders noticed his hesitation.

"Bah!" he said, "speak, then; do you think I am afraid—a coward that fears to know the worst? I shall not be the first man that has died, nor, in all probability, the last. We ought to be used to it by this time, *nous autres!*"

"Perhaps it is always best to be prepared for the worst," says Graham, recovering himself at this address, and taking refuge at last in a conventional little speech. "And though we must always hope for the best, I do not think it right to conceal from you, Monsieur, that you are very much injured and shaken. If you have any arrangements to make, anyone you would wish to send for, or to see, I earnestly advise you to lose no time."

He watched M. Linders narrowly as he spoke, and saw a sudden gleam of fear or excitement light

up his dull eyes for a moment, whilst his fingers clutched nervously at the sheet, but that was all the sign he made.

“So—I am going to die?” he said, after a pause. “Well—that is ended, then. Send for anyone? Whom should I send for?” he added, with some vehemence. “For your priests, I suppose, to come and light candles, and make prayers over me—is that what you are thinking of, by chance? I won’t have one of them—you need not think it, do you hear?—not one.”

“Pardon me,” said Graham, “but it was not of priests I was thinking just then—indeed, it seems to me that, at these moments, a man can turn nowhere so safely as to his God—but there are others——”

He spoke quietly enough, but M. Linders interrupted him with a fierce, hoarse whisper. “I can arrange my own affairs. I have no one to send to—no one I wish to see. Let me die in peace.”

In spite of his assumed indifference, his whole soul was filled and shaken with a sudden dread terror; for the moment he had forgotten even his child. Graham saw it, but could not urge him further just then; he only passed his arm under the pillow, so as to raise his head a little, and then said, with such professional cheerfulness as he could muster,

"*Allons*, Monsieur, you must have courage. Calm yourself; you are not going to die yet, and we must hope for the best. You may live to see many people yet."

M. Linders appeared scarcely to hear what he was saying; but in a few moments his face relaxed, and a new expression came into it, which seemed to soften the grey, ghastly look.

"My poor little girl!" he said, with a sort of groan—"my little Madelon!—to leave thee all alone, *pauvre petite!*"

"It was precisely of her that I wished to speak," said Graham. "I am afraid, in any case, you must look forward to a long illness, and, on her account, is there no friend, no relation you would wish to send for?"

"I have no friends—no relations," said M. Linders, impatiently. "A long illness? Bah! M. le Docteur, I know, and you know that I am going to die—to-day, to-morrow, who knows?—and she will be left alone. She has no one in the world but me, and she has been foolish enough to love me—my little one!"

He paused for a moment, and then went on, with a vehemence that struggled for utterance, with his hoarse feeble voice and failing breath.

"If this cursed accident had happened but one

day sooner or later, I could have left her a fortune—but a superb fortune; only one day sooner—I had it two days ago—or to-morrow—I should have had my revenge last night of that *scélérat*—that devil—that Legros, and won back the money he cheated me of, he—he—of all men, a mere beginner, a smatterer—ah! if I had been the man I once was, it would have been a different account to settle——”

He lay back panting, but began again before Graham could speak.

“I only want time—give me a little time, and my little Madeleine shall have such a fortune as shall make her independent of every one; or stay, why not send for him now? I will give you his address—yes, now—now at once, before it is too late!”

“That is quite impossible, Monsieur,” Graham answered with decision; “and if you agitate yourself in this way, I must refuse to listen to another word. You are doing all you can to lessen your chances of recovery.”

“You do not play, Monsieur?” said M. Linders, struck with a new idea, and not in the least attending to what Graham was saying.

“Do you want to win my money?” said the young man, half smiling. “No, I do not play, nor, if I did, have I any money to lose. Leave all

these notions alone, I entreat of you; calm yourself; you need not trouble yourself to speak much, but just tell me what your wishes are concerning your little girl—in any case it is always best to be prepared. Have you made any will? Is there any one to whose care you would wish to entrust her in the event of your death?"

M. Linders had exhausted his strength and his passion for the moment, and answered quietly enough. No, he had made no will, he said—of what use? Everything he had was hers, of course—little enough too, as matters stood. He owned he did not know what was to become of her; he had made no arrangements—he had never thought of its coming to this, and then he had always counted on leaving her a fortune. He had sometimes thought of letting her be brought up for the stage; that might be arranged now, if he could see S——, the manager of the Théâtre —— . Could he be sent for at once?

"Certainly, if you really wish it," answered Graham with some hesitation, and then added frankly, "I have no sort of right to offer an opinion, but will you not consider a moment before fixing on such a fate for your child? She is surely very young to be thrown amongst strangers, on such a doubtful

career, especially without you at hand to protect her."

"It is true I shall not be there," said the father with a groan; "I had forgotten that. And I shall never see my little one grown up. Ah! what is to become of her?"

"Has she no relations?" said Graham, "in England for instance——"

"In England!" cried M. Linders fiercely, "what could make you fancy that?"

"I had understood that her mother was English——" began Graham.

"You are right, Monsieur; her mother was English, but she has no English relations, or, if she has, they are nothing to her, and she shall never know them. No," he said slowly, after a pause, "I suppose there is only one thing to be done, and yet I would almost rather she lay here dead by my side, that we might be buried together in one grave; it would perhaps be happier for her, poor little one! Ah, what a fate! but it must be—you are right, I cannot send her out alone and friendless into the world, she must go to her aunt."

"She has an aunt, then?" said Graham, with some surprise.

"Yes, Monsieur, she has an aunt, my sister Thérèse, with whom I quarrelled five and twenty

years ago, and whom I have cordially hated ever since; and if ever woman deserved to be hated, she does;" and indeed, though he had not mentioned his sister's name for years, the very sound of it seemed to revive the old enmity in all its fresh bitterness. "She lives near Liége," he went on presently. "She is the Superior of a convent there, having risen to that eminence through her superior piety and manifold good works, doubtless. Mon Dieu!" he cried, with another of his sudden impotent bursts of passion and tenderness, "that it should have come to this, that I should shut up my little one in a convent! And she will be miserable—she will blame me, she will think me cruel; but what can I do? what can I do?"

"But it seems to me the best thing possible," said Graham, who, in truth, was not a little relieved by this sudden and unexpected solution of all difficulties. "So many children are educated in convents, and are very happy there; she will be certainly well taught and cared for, and you must trust to your sister for the future."

"Never!" he said, half raising himself on his elbow with a mighty effort. "Well taught!—yes, I know the sort of teaching she will get there; she will be taught to hate and despise me, and then they will make her a nun—they will try to do it,

but that shall never be! I will make Madelon promise me that. My little one a nun!—I will not have it! Ah! I risk too much; she shall not go!”

He fell back on the pillow gasping, panting, almost sobbing, all pretence and semblance of cynicism and indifference gone in this miserable moment of weakness and despair. Was it for this, then, that he had taught his child to love him—that he had watched and guarded and cherished her—that he should place her now in the hands of his enemy, and that she should learn to hate his memory when he was dead? Ah! he was dying, and from the grave there would be no return—no hand could be stretched out from thence to claim her—no voice make itself heard to appeal to her old love for him, to remind her of happy bygone days when she had believed in him, and to bid her be faithful to him still. Those others would be able to work their will then, while he lay silent for evermore, and his little one would too surely learn what manner of father she had had, perhaps—who knows?—learn to rejoice in the day that had set her free from his influence.

Graham very likely understood something of what was passing in M. Linders' mind, revealed, as it had been, by those few broken words, for he said in a kind voice,

“I think you may surely trust to your child’s love for you, M. Linders, for she seems to have found all her happiness in it hitherto, and it is so strong and true that I do not think it will be easily shaken, nor can I fancy anyone will be cruel enough to attempt it.” And then, seeing how little capable M. Linders seemed at that moment of judging wisely, he went on to urge the necessity of Madelon’s being sent to her aunt as her natural guardian; representing the impossibility of leaving her without money or friends in the midst of strangers.

“There is a little money,” said M. Linders, “a few thousand francs—I do not know how much exactly; you will find it in that desk. It would start her for the stage; she has talent—she would rise. S—— heard her sing once; if he were here now, we might arrange——”

He was rambling off in a low broken voice, hardly conscious, perhaps, of what he was saying. Graham once more interposed.

“No, no,” he said, “you must not think of it. Let her go to her aunt. Don’t be uneasy about her getting there safely; I will take charge of her.”

“You will?” said M. Linders, fixing his dim eyes on Graham, and with some resumption of his old manner. “Pardon, Monsieur, but who are you, that you take such an interest in my affairs?”

"Anyone must take an interest in your little girl," said Graham warmly, and in the kind, frank voice that somehow always carried with it the conviction of his sincerity and good faith, "and I am truly glad that the chance that brought me to this hotel has put it in my power to be of use to you and to her. For the rest, my name is Graham, and I am an army surgeon. I don't suppose you recollect the circumstance, Monsieur, but I very well remember meeting you at Chaudfontaine some years ago."

"No, I don't remember," said M. Linders faintly, "but I think I may trust you. You will see that Madelon reaches Liège safely?"

"I will take her there myself," answered Graham. "Would you like to send any message to your sister?"

"I will write," said M. Linders, "or rather you shall write for me; but presently—I cannot talk any more now—it must do presently."

Indeed he was faint from exhaustion, and Graham could only do all that was possible to revive him, and then remain by his side till he should have recovered his strength a little; and as he sat there, silently watching, I daresay he preached a little sermon to himself, but in no unfriendly spirit to his patient, we may be sure. This, then, was what life

might come to—this might be the end of all its glorious possibilities, of all its boundless hopes and aims. To this man, as to another, had the great problem been presented, and he had solved it—thus; and to Graham, in the fulness of his youth, and strength, and energy, the solution seemed stranger than the problem. To most of us, perhaps, as years go on, life comes to be represented by its failures rather than its successes, by its regrets rather than its hopes; enthusiasms die out, illusions vanish, belief in the perfectibility of ourselves and of others fades, as we learn to realize the shortness of life, the waywardness of human nature, the baffling power of circumstances, too easily allowed; but in their place, a humble faith in a more perfect and satisfying hereafter, which shall be the complement of our existence here, the fulfilment of our unfinished efforts, our many shortcomings, springs up, let us trust, to encourage us to new strivings, to ever-fresh beginnings, which shall perhaps be completed and bear fruit in another world, perhaps be left on earth to work into the grand economy of progress—not wholly useless in any case. But at four or five and twenty, in spite of some failures and disappointments, the treasure of existence to an honest, frank heart, still seems inexhaustible as it is inestimable. The contrast between the future Graham looked forward to,

full of hopes and ambitions, and this past whose history he could guess at, and whose results he contemplated, forced itself upon him, and an immense compassion filled the young man's heart at the sight of this wasted life, of this wayward mind, lighted up with the sudden, passionate gleams of tenderness for his child, the one pure affection perhaps that survived to witness to what had been—a great compassion, an honest, wondering pity for this man who had thus recklessly squandered his share of the common birth right. Ah! which of us, standing on safe shores, and seeing, as all must see at times, the sad wreck of some shattered life cast up by the troubled waves at our feet, does not ask himself, in no supercilious spirit, surely, but with an awe-struck humility, “Who or what hath made thee to differ?”

Perhaps, as M. Linders lay there, he also preached to himself a little sermon, after his own peculiar fashion, for when, at the end of half an hour, he once more aroused himself, all signs of agitation had disappeared, and it was with a perfect calmness that he continued the conversation. Graham could not but admire this composure in the man whom but just now he had seen shaken with passion and exhausted with conflicting emotions; whom indeed he had had to help, and judge for, and support in his hour of weakness and suffering; whilst now M.

Linders had resumed his air of calm superiority as the man of the world, which seemed at once to repel and to forbid support and sympathy from the youth and inexperience at his side.

“You are right, Monsieur,” he said, breaking the silence abruptly, and speaking in a clear, though feeble voice, “Madelon must go to her aunt. Did I understand you to say you would take charge of her to Liége?”

“I will certainly,” said Graham; “if——”

“I am exceedingly indebted to you,” said M. Linders, “but I am afraid such a journey may interfere with your own plans.”

“Not in the least,” replied Graham. “I am only travelling for amusement, and have no one to consult but myself.”

“Ah—well, I shall not interfere with your amusement long; and in the meantime, believe me, I am sensible of your goodness. It may make matters easier if you take a letter from me to my sister. I am afraid I cannot write myself, but I could dictate—if it be not troubling you too much—there are a pen and ink somewhere there; and if you could give me anything—I still feel rather faint.”

Graham rose, gave him another cordial, drew a small table to the bedside, and sat down to write.

M. Linders considered for a moment, and then began to dictate.

“MA SŒUR,—We parted five and twenty years ago, with a mutual determination never to see each other again—a resolution which has been perfectly well kept, and which there is no danger of our breaking now, as I shall be in my grave before you read this letter; and you will have the further consolation of reflecting that, as we have never met again in this world, neither is there any probability of our doing so in another——”

“Pardon me,” said Graham, laying down his pen, as M. Linders dictated these last words, “but you are about to recommend your child to your sister’s care; of what use can it be to begin with words that can only embitter any ill-feeling there may have been between you?”

“But it is a great consolation I am offering her there,” says M. Linders, in his feeble voice. “However, as you will—*recommençons*; but no more interruptions, Monsieur, for my strength is not inexhaustible.”

“MA SŒUR,—It is now five and twenty years since we parted, with the determination never to see

each other again. Whether we have done well to keep to this resolution or not, matters little now; we shall, at any rate, have no temptation in the future to break it, for I shall be in my grave before you receive this letter. I am dying, a fact which may possess some faint interest for you even now—or may not—that is not to the purpose either. It is not of myself that I would speak, but of my child. I am sending her to you, Thérèse, as to the only relative she has in the world; look on her, if you prefer it, as your mother's only grandchild; we had a mother once who loved me, and whom you professed to love—for her sake be kind to Madelon. I am not rich, and without money I cannot leave her amongst strangers, otherwise I would have found some other means of providing for her; at the same time, I do not send her to you absolutely penniless—she will take to you the sum of three thousand francs, which will provide her board for the next two or three years, at any rate; I do not cast her on your charity. I have two requests to make, and if your religion teaches you to have any regard for the wishes of a dying man, I trust you will hold them sacred as such. In the first place, I demand of you that you should not bring her up to be a nun; she has not, and never will have, the slightest vocation—is not that the right word?—for such a

life. My wish is that she should be educated for the stage, but I do not absolutely desire it; circumstances must in some measure decide, and something must be left to your discretion, but a nun she shall not be. In the second place, respect my memory, so far as my little Madeleine is concerned. Keep your powers of abusing me, if they be not already exhausted, for the benefit of others; she has never been separated from me since she was an infant, and the little fool has actually learnt to love me, and to believe in me. It is an innocent delusion, and has made her happy—do not disturb it. I tell you, my sister, it will be the worst work you have yet wrought upon earth, and an evil day for you, if, even when I am in my grave, you try to come between me and my daughter.

“Your brother,

“ADOLPHE LINDERS.”

“I will sign it,” said the sick man, holding out his hand for the pen. He had dictated the letter with some pauses and gasps for breath, but in the uniform indifferent voice that he had adopted since the beginning of the conversation. He dropped the pen, when he had scrawled the signature with almost powerless fingers, and his hand fell heavily on the bed again. “That is done,” he said, and, after a

pause, continued, "Monsieur, circumstances have compelled me to place a confidence in you, with which, at another time, I should have hesitated to burden you, fearing to cause you inconvenience."

"You cause me no inconvenience, and I shall do my best to carry out your wishes," said Horace. "In return, I must beg of you to keep yourself quiet now."

"One moment, Monsieur—my money you will find in that desk, as I have said; after paying my funeral and other expenses, you will, I think, find there is still the sum left that I have named in my letter. I must beg of you to hand it over to my sister. I can trust her so far, I believe; and I will not have my child a pauper on her hands, dependent on her charity for food and clothing; otherwise it might have been wiser—however, it is too late now, and in two or three years much may happen. One word more, and I have done. I have no sort of claim on your kindness, Monsieur, but you have proved yourself a friend, and as such I would ask you not to lose sight of Madelon entirely. She will be but a friendless little one when I am gone, and I have not much confidence in her aunt's tender mercies."

"You may depend upon it that I will not," said

Graham earnestly, and hardly thinking of the sort of responsibility he was accepting.

"Thank you; then that is all. And now, Monsieur le Docteur, how long do you give me?"

"How long?" said Graham.

"Ah! how long to live?—to-day, to-night, to-morrow? How long, in short?"

Then Graham spoke plainly at last, without further reticence or concealment, so useless in the face of this indifference and levity, real or affected.

"M. Linders," he said, "the chance on which your recovery hangs is so slight, that I do not think it probable, hardly possible, that you can live over to-morrow. Will you not try to understand this?"

There was something so wistful and kind and honest in Graham's expression as he stood there, looking down on his patient, that M. Linders was touched, perhaps, for he held out his hand with a little friendly gesture; but even then he could not, or would not abandon his latest pose of dying *en philosophe*.

"I understand well enough," he answered; "a man does not arrive at my age, *mon ami*, without having faced death more than once. You think, perhaps, it has terrors for me?—not at all; to speak frankly, pain has, but I do not suffer so much now. That is a bad sign, perhaps. Well, never mind, you

have done your best for me, I know, and I thank you. Except for that little regret that you know of as regards Legros and—and Madelon, I am content that life should come to an end—it is not too delightful in any case, and those that I cared for most did their best to spoil mine for me. For people who believe in a hereafter, and choose to contemplate a doubtful future, adorned with flames and largely peopled with devils, I can imagine death to have its unpleasant side; but I look upon all such notions as unphilosophical in the extreme. And now, Monsieur, I think I could sleep a little. By-and-by, when Madelon awakes, I should like to see her.”

He turned his head away, and presently fell into a light dose. Did he mean, or did he persuade himself that he meant half of what he said? Graham could not decide; and, in truth, he had uttered his little speech with an air of dignity and resignation that half imposed upon the younger man, and impressed him, in spite of his better judgment. An heroic soul going forth with an unfeigned stoicism to meet its fate? Or an unhappy man, striving to hide a shivering consciousness from himself and others, with an assumption of philosophical scepticism? Ah! who was Graham, that he should judge or weigh the secrets of another man's heart at such

an hour as this? He left the bedside, and went back once more to his writing.

A few minutes afterwards, Madame Lavaux knocked softly, and looked into the room. Graham went out into the passage to speak to her, closing the door after him.

"How is he now, the poor Monsieur?" asks Madame.

"He is sleeping now," Graham answered; "there is nothing to be done but to keep him as quiet as possible."

"And will he recover, do you think?"

"Hardly. One must always hope; but he is very ill."

"Ah! well," said the landlady, resigning herself; "but, after all," she added, "it is sad to see a man die like that; and then there is the child. Otherwise the world will be none the worse for wanting him. But what is to become of the little girl?"

"That is all arranged," replied Graham, "she is to go to an aunt, a sister of her father's, who, it appears, is Superior of a convent near Liége. But can you tell me, Madame, had Madame Linders quarrelled with her English relations? When she was dying alone here, had she no friends of her own that she could have sent for to be with her?"

"She would not have them, Monsieur; you see, she

was devoted to her husband in spite of all, this poor Madame, and *he* had quarrelled with her relations, I believe; at any rate, she would not send for them. 'Adolphe will come,' she would always say, 'and it would vex him to find anyone here,' and so she died alone, for he never arrived till the next morning. However," continues Madame, "it was not of that I came to speak now, it was to know if Monsieur would not wish to have a nurse to-night to attend to the poor gentleman? It is what we must have had if you had not been here, and there is no reason why you should knock yourself up with nursing him."

"It certainly might be better," said Graham considering, "I had thought of it, but—however, you are quite right, Madame, a nurse we will have; where can I get one?"

Madame said he had better apply to the Sœurs de Charité, and gave him an address, adding that if he would like to go himself she could spare half an hour to sit with Monsieur there.

"I will go at once," replied Graham, "whilst he is sleeping; he is not likely to rouse again just at present; don't let him talk or move if he should awake, but it is not probable that he will."

So it was arranged, and Madame Lavaux established herself with her knitting in the dim, silent

room, whilst Graham departed on his errand, satisfied that his patient was in safe hands. Not ten minutes had elapsed, however, when a knock came at the door of the sick-room, and a summons—could Madame come at once? Madame cast a look at her charge; he was perfectly still and quiet, sleeping profoundly apparently; there could be no harm in leaving him for a moment. She went, intending to return immediately; but, alas! for human intentions, downstairs she found a commotion that drove M. Linders, M. le Docteur, and everything else out of her head for the time being. Madame la Comtesse *au premier* had lost her diamond ring—her ring, worth six thousand francs, an heirloom, an inestimable treasure; lost it? it had been stolen—she knew it, felt convinced of it; she had left it for five minutes on her dressing-table whilst she went to speak to some dressmaker or milliner, and on her return it had vanished. Unpardonable carelessness on her part, she admitted, but that did not alter the fact; it had been stolen, and must be found; house, servants, visitors, luggage, all must be searched and ransacked. Where were the gendarmes? let all these people be taken into custody at once, pointing to the group of startled, wondering, servants,—let everyone be taken into custody. Madame Lavaux had enough to do and to think of

for the next hour, we may be sure, and though, at the end of that time, Madame la Comtesse found the ring safe in the corner of her pocket, whither it had slipped off her finger, and the disturbance was at an end, not so were the consequences of that disturbance.

For in the meantime a very different scene was being acted out upstairs.

CHAPTER III.

Madelon's Vigil.

FIVE minutes after Madame Lavaux had left the room, Madelon, just awakened from her sound sleep, came creeping gently in. It was almost dark by this time, for it was late in the afternoon, and the Venetian shutters were still closed that had kept out the heat and glare all day; but now she threw them back, and let in the tepid evening breeze, and the faded light of the dying day; carriages and carts were rattling in the street below, shrill voices came from the opposite houses where lights were appearing here and there; high up in the serene grey-blue sky a few reddened clouds had caught the last gleams of the setting sun.

"Madelon," said M. Linders, roused by the noise she had made in opening the shutters.

A sudden throb of joy came over her as she heard his voice again, and she went swiftly and stood by his bedside.

"Are you better, papa?" she said, putting her two little cool hands into one of his, hot with fever.

"We are alone, are we not?" he answered, looking feebly round. "Come and sit up here by me. Can you jump up? That is right," as she climbed up and nestled close to him, her feet tucked under the sheet; "here, *petite*, let me put my arm round you."

He raised himself with an effort, and passed his arm round her, so that she could lay her head on his shoulder; and then in answer to her question,—

"No, I am not better," he said, "and I do not suppose I ever shall be better now. But never mind that," as she raised her head suddenly, and looked at him with wide, frightened eyes, "let us talk a little, Madelon. We have always been happy together; have we not, my child?"

"Ah! yes, papa."

"And later, when you are grown into a woman—as you will be, you know, by-and-by—and you think of the years when you were a little girl, you will like to recall them; will you not, Madelon? You will remember that they were happy?"

"Yes, papa, I have been happy, ah, so happy!" says Madelon, half crying, and nestling closer to him; "but why do you talk so? What do you mean?"

"You will think of all our travels together, what

pretty places we have visited, all the *fête* days we have spent; and you will remember that, whatever else I may or may not have done, I have always tried to make you happy, and to be a good papa to my little one. Promise me that, Madelon."

"I promise it, papa," she said. "How could I forget? Why should I not remember? Why do you talk to me in this way, papa? Are you very ill?"

"Very ill," he replied, holding her tighter to him, "so ill that all those happy days are come to an end for me, and for you, too, *ma petite*; we shall never go about again together. You—you—" his voice broke with a sort of groan, but he went on again directly, "I wonder what my little Madelon will be like when she grows into a great girl? I should have liked to have seen you, my little one. I wonder if you will be tall—I dare say you will—for your mother was tall, and your face is very like hers."

"Am I like her, papa?"

"Very," he said, stroking her wavy hair, with his feeble fingers; "your eyes—yes, you have eyes that resemble hers exactly, and sometimes I have thought that when you grew up it would be almost like seeing her over again—for you know I did love her," he added, in a lower voice, turning his head

restlessly on the pillow, "though they said I did not. I never meant her to die alone; they might have known that. I wish— Bah! I am forgetting——"

"What did you say, papa?"

"Nothing," he answered; "I think I was forgetting where I was. How dark it is growing! you must light the candles soon. I must look at you again; you know I want to see your eyes, and smile, and pretty hair once more. And you, my little one, you will not forget my face? Don't cry, don't cry," he said, with a sudden pain in his voice; "I cannot bear it. I have never made you cry before: have I, my child?"

"Never, never!" she said, stifling her tears desperately.

"You must think of me sometimes when you are grown up," he went on in his feeble voice, harping still on the same subject. "You will have no money, my poor little one—if it had not been for that devil Legros—but it is too late to think of that now. Well, I think you will have beauty, and that will go far even if you have no *dot*, and I should like you to marry well. But when you have a husband, and are rich, perhaps, you must still think sometimes of the days when you were a little

girl, and had a papa who loved no one in the world so much as his little Madelon."

"Papa, I want no money, nor husband, nor anything else," cried Madelon, in a burst of tears, and throwing both her arms round his neck. "I want nobody but you, and I love you, and always shall love you better than any one else in the world. Papa, are you going to die and leave me?"

"So it seems," he said bitterly. "It is not my choice, Madelon, but one cannot arrange these little matters for oneself, you see. Now listen, my child; I am not going to leave you quite alone. I have a sister, who is your Aunt Thérèse; I have never spoken to you about her before, for she became a nun, and we have not always been very good friends, but I think she will give you a home. She is the Superior of a convent near Liége, and that English gentleman—the doctor, you know—will take you to her; do you understand?"

"Yes, papa."

"Well, you must stay with her for the present. It is not just what I could have wished for you, *ma petite*, but I have no choice, as it happens; and if ever you are dull or unhappy there, you will not blame me, or think I was unkind in sending you, will you, my child? for indeed I could not help it,

and you will be a good little girl, I know. By-and-by, as I said, perhaps you will marry—I cannot arrange all these matters beforehand. I used to think sometimes that perhaps you might have come out on the stage a few years hence. Would you have liked that, Madelon?”

“Yes—no—oh, I don’t know, papa—I want you—I want you!”

“Yes—you will want me, *pauvre petite*. Good Heavens! that a child so small, so young should be left without me to take care of her! Bah, I must not think of it. Madelon, there is one thing more you must promise me—never to become a nun.”

“A nun, papa?”

“Yes, a nun,” he repeated, in his feeble vehemement way, “a nun like your Aunt Thérèse. Do you know what it means? To grow pious, and narrow-minded, and sour, to live for ever shut up between four walls from which there is no escape, to think yourself better than all the world. Madelon, promise me never to become a nun; if I thought that were the future in store for you—promise me, I say.”

“I promise, papa,” she said, quite solemnly, putting her hands together with a quaint little gesture; “indeed I should not like it at all.”

"If I could only foresee—if I could only arrange," he said piteously. "God knows I have done what I think is best for you, my child, and yet—who knows what may come of it? Madelon," he went on in a faint, pleading, broken voice, "you will not let them make you think ill of me, and blame and despise me when I am dead? They will try perhaps, but you must always love me, my darling, as you do now; it must not be all in vain—all that I have been striving for—ah, don't cry—there—we won't talk any more now—another time."

There was a minute's silence in the darkening twilight; Madelon's face was hidden in her father's shoulder, as he lay there with his arm still round her and his eyes closed, faint and exhausted. All of a sudden he roused himself with a start.

"Ah, I am dying!" he cried, with a hoarse voice, "and it is all dark! Light the candles, Madelon—light them quickly, I must see you once more before I die!"

Startled, awe-struck, only half realizing the meaning of his words, Madelon slid off the bed and prepared to obey. At that moment there came a tremendous knocking at the door of the room, and a voice half chanting, half shouting,—

"Are you here, my friend? Are you within tonight? Can one enter? Open quick; it is I, it is

your friend! Are you ready for your little revenge? I am ready, for my part; I will give it to you—yes, with pleasure—yes, with an open heart!”

“It is Legros!” cried M. Linders from his bed, in a sudden spasm of rage, “it is that villain, that *misérable*! Yes, yes, come in; Madelon, light the candles quickly; where are the cards? Ah—I will have my revenge yet!”

The door burst open, and Legros entered, just as Madelon had succeeded in lighting the candles. He stopped short in his uproarious entrance, suddenly sobered by the appearance of M. Linders, as he lay propped up with pillows, his white face and bandaged head, and eyes gleaming with fever and rage.

“Papa is very ill,” says Madelon. “Monsieur, do not stay to-night, I beg of you!”

“What are you saying, Madelon?” cried her father; “I forbid you to say that again; bring me the cards. Legros, I am ready for you; ah, there is then one more chance in life!”

“You are not fit to play, Monsieur,” said the young man, stepping back; “I will come again to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” answered M. Linders, with a sort of laugh, “have you then so many to-morrows that you can talk of them so recklessly? Well,

then, I will tell you—I have not—not one; but I have to-night, and that I will not lose. Ah! you think to cheat me in that way? you will put me off till to-morrow? you will say then—Ah, this M. Linders can never have his revenge now, he is quiet enough, I can keep his money in my pocket? You shall not say that, Monsieur; Madelon, bring the cards, and the lights, close to me, here, I cannot see well, it is so dark.”

He seized the cards, and began to deal them out on the coverlet with his trembling hands. Madelon placed a small table at his side, put one candle on it, and with the other in her hand stood close to his pillow white and motionless. Legros slowly and reluctantly drew a chair to the bedside, and sat down opposite. There was a moment's pause, whilst M. Linders shifted and sorted his cards, and then, “A vous, Monsieur,” he cried, with a sort of fierce impatience; but at the same instant his hold relaxed, the cards tumbled all in a heap on to the floor, his head fell back. Madelon screamed and started forward, upsetting the table and the candle; Legros sprang up. It was at that moment that the door opened, and Graham, followed by a *Sœur de Charité*, entered the room.

Never, to the last day of his life, one may fancy, would Graham forget the little scene before him,

which, indeed, always returned to his memory with an impression as vivid as that made upon him now—the overturned table, the scattered cards, Madelon in her white frock, her pale scared face, her wavy hair, her great brown eyes illuminated by the candle she still held, the terrified Legros, the ghastly look of the dying man—he saw it all at a glance, as he entered the room he had left so dim and silent but half an hour ago. It was to Legros he first addressed himself in a tone of strong indignation.

“Monsieur,” he said, “you can have no business to transact with a dying man, and your presence is not desired here. Might I request you to leave me alone with my patient?”

“On my honour, Monsieur,” cries the other, pale and stammering; “it was no doing of mine—he would have it so.”

Graham, very likely, did not hear what he said; he was already at M. Linders’ side. He raised his head, he felt his pulse and heart.

“It is nearly over,” he said to the Sœur de Charité; “will you take the little girl into the next room?” And Madelon, frightened and trembling, offered no resistance as the Sœur took her by the hand and led her away.

It was as Graham said; all was nearly over. The feeble life, that with careful tending and

cherishing might have flickered and lingered on yet a little longer, was all but quenched in this last supreme passion and effort. M. Linders never spoke again, and died in less than two hours, quietly at last, as men do for the most part die, it is said.

"That poor child!" said Graham, "who will tell her?"

"I will," said the brave, cheery little Sœur Angélique, and went.

* * * * *

It was nearly midnight when the sad little bustle that had been going on in the chamber of death was hushed at last, and the Sœur de Charité prepared to depart. She had offered indeed to stay all night, but when Graham assured her that there was no occasion for any one to remain, as his room was just opposite, and he should be on the watch to see that all was quiet, she owned that she should be glad to go, as there was much illness about, and her services might be required elsewhere. She stood talking to Graham for a few moments before leaving.

"That poor little one," she said, "I should like to have one look at her, just to see that she is quiet; I don't think she half understood, or took in, what I said to her."

"Madame Lavaux told me she was in bed,"

Graham answered, "but we will see if she is asleep. Poor child, she will understand it all soon enough."

He opened the door gently between the two rooms, and they looked in. All was dark and silent, but they could just distinguish a little head laid on the white pillow, and could hear Madelon's soft, regular breathing.

"That is all right," said Graham, "we will not go in and disturb her; she will sleep till the morning, I daresay, for she was up almost all last night." He closed the door again as he spoke, and so they left her.

It was true that Madelon was asleep, but she was not exactly in bed. When the Sister had come in to tell her of her father's death, she had found her seated on the ground close to the door, with her hands clasped round her knees, her head leaning against the doorway; some one had brought in some supper on a tray, but it stood on the table untouched, though she had eaten nothing since the morning. She did not move when Sœur Angélique came in, but she looked up with an expression of dumb, helpless misery that went to the Sister's heart; she sat down beside her on the floor, put her arm round her, and told her the sad news in her gentle, quiet tones, which had acquired a ring of sympathy and tenderness in a thousand mournful

scenes of sorrow and despair; but, as she had said to Horace, she hardly knew whether the child understood her, or took in what she was saying. Madelon did not speak nor cry; she only sat gazing at the little Sister with a look of perplexed terror dilating her brown eyes, that never changed as Soeur Angélique went on with her pious, gentle maxims and consolations, which fell blankly enough we may be sure on our small Madelon's bewildered mind; and presently, hearing herself called, and seeing indeed that she was making no impression with her kind little speeches, the Sister rose to go, saying as she did so, "You will go to bed now, *chère petite*, will you not?" and then thinking that a familiar face and voice might perhaps have a kindlier influence than her own just then, she added, "and I will ask Madame Lavaux to come to you."

"No, no," cried Madelon, suddenly rousing, and starting up at these last words. She had comprehended what the Sister had told her well enough so far as words went, but she was too stunned and confused to take in their full meaning; and in truth her presence there at all had only been another unfamiliar element in this bewildering whirl of events, imparting an additional sense of unreality. But when she mentioned Madame Lavaux, the name linked itself at once with recent memories and

emotions, and its accustomed association with her every-day life made it a rallying point, as it were, for her scattered ideas. Madame Lavaux had been cross and unkind to her the night before; Madame had buoyed her up with false hopes of her father's recovery only that morning; Madelon did not want her, would not see her. She stood still for a few minutes after the Sœur de Charité had left the room, all her sorrows and doubts and certainties resolved for the moment into a dull, unreasoning dread of seeing Madame Lavaux come in; and then, suddenly fancying she heard footsteps approaching the door, she hastily blew out her candle, and all dressed as she was, crept under the coverlet of the bed. She would pretend to be asleep, she thought, and then no one would disturb her. The footsteps passed on, but presently the door did open, and some one looked in: it was Madame Lavaux, who, seeing that Madelon made no sign, concluded that she was asleep, and went away softly, with a kind pity in her heart for the desolate child. As for Madelon, the pretence of slumber soon passed into reality, for, after lying awake for a while listening to the low voices and rustling movements in the next room, fatigue and her own enforced tranquillity overcame her, and she fell sound asleep.

It must have been long past midnight when she awoke again with a sudden feeling of fright and strangeness, for which she could not account, but which made her spring off the bed and listen if she could hear any one moving. All was very still; not a sound came from the adjoining apartment; her own room was quite dark, for the windows and outside shutters were closed. Madelon felt scared, lonely, desolate, without knowing why; and then, all at once, she remembered the reason. All that the Sister had said came back with fresh meaning and distinctness to her senses restored by sleep; and, sitting down on the floor just where she was, she began to cry with a low moaning, sobbing sound, as a child cries when it is sorry and not naughty.

No one heard her, no one came near her; she was all alone, and in a few minutes she stopped crying, half frightened at her own voice in the silence and darkness. And then she began to wonder if her father were still in the next room, or whether they had taken him away anywhere; if not, he was all alone in there, as she was in here. It would be some comfort to be with him, she thought. Madelon knew that he was dead, but death was an unfamiliar experience with her; and she could not perhaps clearly separate this hour from all other

hours when she had been hurt, or sorrowful, or frightened, and had run to her father to be comforted.

She got up, and, opening the door, stole softly into the other room. It was not quite so dark in there: the windows and Venetian shutters were wide open, and a lamp in the street below gave an uncertain light, by which she could just distinguish the gleam of the mirror, the table in the centre of the room, and the bed, where the outline of a silent form was vaguely defined under the white covering sheet. Madelon had had some half-formed idea of getting on to the bed, and nestling down by her father, as she had done only the evening before, when he had put his arm round her, and they had talked together; but now a chill dread crept over her—a sense of change, of separation; she had not even the courage to raise the sheet and look upon his face. She stood gazing for a moment, afraid to go back into the darkness of her own room; and then, with a sudden movement, as though urged by some terror, she turned quickly away, and went swiftly to the open window. She looked down into the narrow, dark street, dimly illuminated by an occasional lamp; she looked up to the starlit space of sky visible above the house-roofs and chimneys, and neither above nor below did she find any com-

fort; for a sudden awful realization of death had come to her in the darkness and silence, almost too keen and terrible for our poor little Madelon to bear—each realization, too, a fresh shock, as with an instinctive shrinking from this new consciousness of an intolerable weight her mind slipped away into some more familiar channel, only to be brought rudely back to this fact, so unfamiliar, and yet the only one for her now, in this sudden shattering of all her small world of hopes and joys and affections. And is it not, in truth, terrible, this *strength* of facts, when we are, as it were, brought face to face with them, and held there till we recognise them? No means of evasion, no hope of appeal from what is, in its very nature, fixed, unalterable, irrevocable; the sin is committed, the loved one gone, the friendship broken and dead, and for us remains the realization in remorse, and heart-breaking, and despair.

Which of us is strong enough to wrestle with facts such as these? which one of us can look them long in the face and live? In the desperate recoil, some of us find ourselves recklessly striving to forget and ignore them, and some find a surer refuge in facts that are stronger still than they; but to one and all, in kindly compassion to human weakness, each new emotion, each passing interest and trivial incident, combines to interpose a barrier between

us and the terrible moment that overwhelmed us; and time which, in later years, seems to drag out the slow hours and days into long ages of dreary grief, can deal swiftly and mercifully with a little child. Hardly had Madelon grasped the true measure of her grievous loss, or tasted its full bitterness, when the reaction came with a great burst of tears, and crouching down in the corner by the window where she had spent so many hours of the previous day, she sobbed away half the terror and awe that were oppressing her poor little heart. Presently she began to grow sorry for herself in a vague, half-conscious sort of way—poor little Madelon, sitting there all alone crying, no one to help her, no one to comfort her—then the sobs came at longer and longer intervals as she gradually lost consciousness of where she was, or why she was there; and with the tears still wet on her cheek, she was nearly asleep again, when she was roused by some one bringing a light into the room; it was Graham, who had come to fetch something he had left on the table, and to see that all was quiet.

Madelon was too much accustomed to late expectant vigils to be startled; and, indeed, in her drowsy state, her first impression was only the familiar one of a welcome arrival. "Me voici, papa!" she cried, jumping up promptly; and then

she saw the young man coming towards her, and with a suddenly revived consciousness of the still, white-sheeted form on the bed, she sank down on her low seat again, the sensation of blank misery all revived.

Graham, on his side, was not a little surprised at the small figure that had started up to meet him; he had fancied her in bed hours ago. He came up to where she was sitting, a most sad, disconsolate little Madelon, all huddled together, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes shining through a short wavy tangle of brown hair, all rough and disordered.

"Don't you think you would be better in bed?" says Horace, in his kind, cheery voice.

"No," she answered abruptly; she was so miserable, so sore at heart with the sudden disappointment, poor child, and Graham had been the cause of it.

"But I am afraid you will be ill to-morrow if you sit there all night," said Graham; "do you know what time it is?"

"No," she said again; and then, as he came a step nearer, she gave a stamp on the floor, and turned her back on him. "Ah, do leave me alone!" she cried, in a miserable little broken voice, covering her face with her hand.

Graham saw that she was utterly wretched and worn out. He could guess pretty well how it had all happened, and reproached himself for not having foreseen and provided against the chance of her waking up and finding herself alone; and now he hardly knew what to do—to speak to her, or to urge her any more just then, would only make matters worse. At last he said quietly,—

“I have some writing to do, and I am going to bring it in here; you will not mind that, I dare-say?”

No answer; Horace left the room, but in a moment he returned, sat down at the table and began to write.

A stillness which the rapid scratching of the pen upon the paper, and the vague, ceaseless hum of the great city coming through the open window, only seemed to render apparent; occasionally the clang of a church clock, the sudden rattle of wheels rising like hollow thunder and dying away into remote distance, a far-off cry, and then a silence more profound by contrast. Madelon, sitting in her dark corner, began to recover herself; in truth, it was the greatest possible relief to have Graham in the room with her, bringing light and the warm sense of a living presence into the chill, unnatural silence and darkness of death; and presently she

began to awake to a half-penitent consciousness that she had been cross, rude, not at all *raisonnable* in fact; little by little she shifted her position, and at length turned quite round to look at M. le Docteur.

Monsieur le Docteur was not looking at her, nor thinking of her apparently, for he never raised his eyes from his writing; the candle light shone on his rough brown hair, on his pleasant, clever face, with keen profile, well defined against a shadowy background. Madelon sat watching him as though fascinated; there was something in the absorbed attention he was giving to his writing, which subdued and attracted her far more than any words he could have spoken to her, or notice he could have taken of her just then. He had apparently forgotten her, this kind Monsieur le Docteur, who had evidently more important things to think about than her and her pettish little speeches; or she had perhaps made him angry, and he would not take any more notice of her at all? There was a certain amount of probability in this last idea to the self-convicted little Madelon, that urged her to some sort of action; she sat still for a few moments longer, then got up and stole softly across the room to where Graham was sitting.

"I did not mean to be cross, Monsieur," she

said, in her little trembling voice, standing with her hands clasped behind her back, and tears in her eyes. Perhaps Graham *had* forgotten her for the moment, for he gave a little start as he looked round.

"I am sure you did not," he said quite earnestly, as he laid down his pen, "but you are so tired to-night, and unhappy too; are you not?"

"Ah, yes," she answered, with a little sob, "I am very unhappy!"

He put his arm round her, as she stood beside him, and took one of her little hands in his; he was so sorry for the poor little girl, and yet he hardly knew what to say to console her. She gave two or three more little sobs, rubbing her eyes with her other hand to keep back the tears; presently she looked up into his face, and said:

"Do you really think I had better go to bed?"

"Indeed I do," replied Horace, much relieved by the practical turn her thoughts were taking; "I am really afraid you will be ill to-morrow if you do not, and you know I must take care of you now."

"I thought papa was all alone in here, and I was alone too," said Madelon, "it was so dark and lonely in my room."

“Well,” said Horace, “I am going to stay in here for a little while, and presently I will open your door, and then it will be almost as if you were in the same room; won’t that do?”

“Yes, thank you,” said Madelon, who indeed was so tired that she could hardly speak. Graham lighted a candle for her, and opened the door leading into the inner room; she paused a moment as she took the light; and gazed up into the kind face looking down upon her; then she put her hand into his, and saying, “Good-night, Monsieur,” went into her own room. Graham closed the door, and returned to his writing. That was all that passed between them, but from that time Madelon’s feeling for Horace Graham approached adoration.

CHAPTER IV.

Madelon's Promise.

A WEEK later, and Madelon was again, as on the day of her father's death, standing at a long open window, looking out on the fading glories of another evening sky. But instead of the narrow Paris street, with its noisy rattle of vehicles, and high white houses limiting the view of earth and heaven, before her lay the small garden of a Liège hotel, and beyond, the steep slope of a hill, where, mingled with trees, roof rose above roof, to where two churches crowning the ridge, showed their grey masses outlined against the clear pale blue.

Madelon had left Paris with Horace Graham the day before, and they had arrived at Liège that afternoon. The young doctor, bent on fulfilling the promise he had made to M. Linders, had altered all his plans, remaining in Paris till his little charge's affairs were settled, and then bringing her to Liège, with the intention of leaving her in her aunt's hands, and then proceeding to Switzerland for the accomplishment of as much of his proposed tour as should

still be practicable. He willingly forfeited these days out of his brief holiday, for he had come to regard the child so unexpectedly thrown upon his care, with a very sincere interest, an affection not unmixed with wonder. Madelon was not at all like any other little girl he had ever had anything to do with, or rather—for his experience on this point was limited—unlike his preconceived notions of little girls in general. We, who know what Madelon's education had been, cannot feel surprised at her total ignorance of all sorts of elementary matters, her perfect unconsciousness of the most ordinary modes of thought current in the world, and of the most generally received standards of right and wrong, combined with a detailed experience in a variety of subjects with which children in general have no acquaintance. But for Graham, there was much that could only be matter for conjecture, much that he could only learn from inference, and to him there was something at once strange and pitiable in the simplicity with which she talked to him of her past life, dwelling on little episodes that only served to exhibit more and more clearly the real character of M. Linders and his associates. Not for the world would he have touched the child's innocent faith, or revealed to our simple Madelon that her father was not the perfection she dreamed

him; but he began to understand better the meaning of M. Linders' last words in his letter to his sister, and they gained a pathetic significance and force as he learnt to appreciate the affection that had subsisted between the father and child, and foresaw too plainly that the time must come when some rude shock would shatter all Madelon's early beliefs, and desecrate, as it were, her tenderest memories. There was something so sad in this certain retribution that must fall upon her innocent head, as the child of such a father, something so touching in her anomalous position, left all friendless and lonely in the midst of such a hard, relentless world, that Horace felt all his tenderest feelings stirred with compassion, and he could have wished to have shielded her for ever from what, he could not but fear, too surely awaited her sooner or later.

What he could do, he did, and it was more than he thought. Madelon's sudden devotion to him, of which indeed he knew and suspected nothing, was of infinite service to her in the first bitterness of her grief, by giving a new current to her ideas, whilst it did away with the sense of lonely desolation that had nearly overpowered her in that first dark hour. In her ardent little nature there was a necessity for loving, even stronger perhaps than for

being loved, a certain enthusiasm, a capacity for devotion that had opportunely found an object in the time of extreme need. For a short hour it had seemed to her as if life itself had come to an end with her father's death; the darkness and vagueness of the future had crushed her down, all the more that she had scarcely comprehended what was the weight that so oppressed her—and then a moment had changed it all; a kind word spoken, a kind face looking down upon her, a friendly hand stretched out, and the vague terrors had vanished. From that time Horace Graham's presence was bliss to our Madelon; when she was unhappy, she dried her tears if he consoled her; if he was out, she sat listening for his returning footsteps; if he was busy, she was content to remain for hours with her book on her knee, her chin propped on her hands, her wistful eyes following his every movement. Monsieur Horace, as it pleased Madelon to call him, knew nothing of all this, we may be sure; but he was very good and tender to the little girl, and did all he could to cheer and console her in the sudden overpowering fits of grief that came upon her from time to time. Finding that she liked to talk of the past, he encouraged her to do so, being anxious, indeed, to learn all he could of her former life, and to ascertain, if, after all, there were indeed no

friends to whom he could apply, in the event of his mission to her Aunt Thérèse proving, from any cause, unsuccessful. But as before, on this point he obtained no sort of satisfaction. Madelon never got much beyond the Florence artists, and her German countess, and Russian princess. M. Linders, it was evident, had had no friends beyond the acquaintance he had made at the different places at which he had been wont to tarry from time to time; and these, for the most part, Graham inferred to have been of so doubtful a character that he could only rejoice for Madelon's sake that all further chance of connection was broken off. Madelon dwelt at great length on their last winter at Florence; she loved Italy, she said; she liked it better than France or Belgium, and Florence was such a beautiful place; had Monsieur Horace ever been there? There were such splendid churches, and palaces and galleries, with such grand pictures and statues; the American used to take her to see them. Papa had several friends there who knew a great deal about pictures, who were artists indeed; she used to go to their studios sometimes, and she liked hearing them talk. And then there were the fêtes and processions, and the country people in such gay dresses, and all with such a blue sky and such bright sunshine; and then the Sundays! very often she and papa would go

out into the country to some inn where they would breakfast and dine; ah! it had been so pleasant. "I shall never be so happy again," sighs Madelon.

The warm, glowing, picturesque Italian life had, as we know, forcibly seized her imagination, her eyes shone with delight as she recalled it, and, almost involuntarily in describing it, she made use of the soft words and phrases of the Italian tongue, which with the ready talent she possessed for languages, she had caught up, and spoke fluently.

"Where did you go when you left Florence?" asked Graham.

"We came north across the Alps and through Switzerland to Baden, and then we stayed a little while at Homburg, and then we were at Wiesbaden for six weeks: do you know Wiesbaden, Monsieur Horace?"

"I was there once for two days," answered Graham; "were you happy there too?"

"Ah yes, I was always happy with papa, but I like Wiesbaden very much. It is so pretty and gay; do you remember the Kursaal gardens? I used to walk there and listen to the band, and sometimes we sat and had coffee at the little round tables, and looked at all the people passing. And then in the evening there were the balls; last summer I used sometimes to go to them with the Russian Princess."

"And who was the Russian Princess?" Graham inquired.

"She was a Russian lady papa knew there, and she was very kind to me; I used to walk with her, and sit by her at the tables, and prick her cards for her; she said I brought her luck."

"Prick her cards!" cried Graham.

"Yes—don't you know? at rouge-et-noir," says Madelon in explanation, "one has little cards to prick, and then one remembers how many times each colour has won; otherwise one would not know at all what to do."

"I see," said Graham; "and so your Russian Princess played at rouge-et-noir—did she win much?"

"Yes, a great deal," cried Madelon, spreading out her hands, "she always had *chance* and was very rich; she wore such beautiful toilettes at the balls; she knew a great many gentlemen, and when I went with her they all danced with me."

And so on, *da capo*; it was always the same story, and Graham soon found that he had reached the limits of Madelon's experiences in that direction. As a last resource, he wrote to her American and German friends at Florence, the most respectable apparently of M. Linders' many doubtful acquaint-

ance, and indeed the only ones with whose address Madelon could furnish him. From the old German he received a prompt reply. The American was absent from Florence, he said on a visit to his own country, which was to be regretted, as it was he who had been M. Linders' friend, and who could have given more information concerning him than it was in his power to do. Indeed, for himself, he knew little about him; he had spent the last winter at Florence, but his society and associates were not such as he, the German, affected. M. Linders had once been an artist, he believed; he had spent much of his time in painting, but he knew nothing of his early life. That he was a notorious gambler he was well aware, and had heard more than one story about him that certainly placed his character in no very favourable light; more than this he could not say. Of Madelon he spoke with the warmest affection, and there was a little note enclosed to her in Graham's letter, which she placed, and carefully preserved, we may be sure, amongst her most precious treasures.

These letters written, and M. Linders' few papers, which were of little interest or importance, examined, Graham had exhausted his sources of possible information, and could only trust no obstacle would intervene to prevent his little charge

being at once received at the convent, and placed under her aunt's guardianship and care. So, with as little delay as possible, they had packed up, and set off on their journey: and now, as Madelon stands at the window of the little hotel salon, Paris lies many a league behind them, beyond the great northern levels, across which they have been speeding for so many hours. And behind her, too, already separated from her by a distance more impassable than that which can be counted by leagues, lies Madelon's old life, to which many and many a time, with passionate outcries, perhaps, with tender unspeakable yearnings, she will look back across an ever-widening space, only to see it recede more hopelessly into a remoter past.

She does not understand all this yet, however, with the new life still scarcely a week old. She is thinking of Monsieur Horace, as she stands there looking out at the sunset sky; they have just dined, and behind her a deft waiter is removing the cloth; and in a minute she turns round gladly, as Monsieur Horace himself comes into the room.

"Shall we take a walk, Madelon?" he says, "or are you too tired?"

"I am not at all tired," Madelon answered. "I should like to have a walk; may we go and look at

the convent where Aunt Thérèse lives? I should like to see it."

"That is a good idea," said Horace. "I will inquire whereabouts it is, and we will go and have a look at it."

The convent, they were told, stood on the outskirts of Liège, about a quarter of a mile outside the town, and a little off the great highroad leading through Chaudfontaine and its adjacent villages to Pepinster and Spa. It was at some distance from the hotel; but Madelon repeated that she was not at all tired, and would like a long walk, so they set off together in the mild September evening. To their left lay the old town with its picturesque churches, its quaint old Bishop's palace, its tall chimneys and busy quays, and wharves, and warehouses, stretching along the river banks; but all this they left on one side as they went along the wide, tree-planted boulevards, where carriages were rolling, and lamps lighting, and people walking about in the ruddy glow; and presently these too were passed by, and they came out on the dusty high-road. A few scattered houses were still to their right hand and to their left; but the city, with its cloud of smoke, its kindling lights and ceaseless movement, was behind them now. Of all its restless stir no

sound reached them through the soft twilight but the chime of bells from its many towers, which rang out the evening angelus just as they saw, standing on the summit of a gentle slope to their left, a building with steep grey slate roofs and belfry, rising above low white surrounding walls, and knew that they had reached their destination.

The carriage-road up to the convent made a circuit, and swept round to the other side of the little declivity; but in front, separated from the high-road by a hedge, there was only the slope of a ploughed field, with a gate at the lower end, opening on to a narrow path that led straight through it up the hill; and this path Graham and Madelon followed, to where it joined a weed-grown footway skirting the outer wall of the building. There was a garden inside apparently, for trees were waving their topmost branches overhead, and vines, and westeria, and Virginia creeper hung down in long, many-coloured tangled shoots and tendrils over the angle of the wall outside. A little beyond was a side-door, with a bench placed beside it; and above, surmounted by a crucifix under a little pent-house, a narrow shelf on which stood an empty bowl and spoon, just placed there probably by some wandering pensioner, who had come there, not in vain, to seek his evening meal.

"Shall we sit down for a minute and rest?" said Graham.

Madelon seated herself at his side without speaking; she had been talking fast enough, and not without cheerfulness, during the early part of her walk; but since they had come within sight of the convent, her chatter had died away into silence. Perhaps she was tired, for she sat quite still now, and showed no wish to resume the conversation. The sound of the city chimes died away; the little bell in the belfry close by kept up its sharp monotone for a minute longer, and then it too was hushed; the trees whispered and rustled, the grasshoppers chirped shrilly all around, but a great stillness seemed to fall upon the darkling earth as the grey evening came down, and enfolded it in its soft mists. Grey fields stretched away on either hand, grey clouds that had been rosy-red half an hour ago, floated overhead; only the trees looked dark against the tender grey sky, the encircling hills of Liège against the lingering twilight glow.

The silent influence of the hour made itself felt on these two also, perhaps, for neither of them spoke at first; indeed, Graham's thoughts had wandered far beyond the horizon before him, when he was aroused by the sound of a little sob, and turning round, he saw that Madelon was crying.

"What is it, Madelon?" he said; "are you tired? What is the matter?"

She did not answer at once, she was struggling with her tears; at last out came the grief.

"It—it all looks so sad, and gloomy, and *triste*," she said. "I do not want to come here and be shut up in the convent; oh, take me away, take me away!"

She clung to Graham as if she were to be parted from him that moment, whilst he soothed her as best he could.

"We will go away at once if you like," he said; "I think we did wrong to come at this time of the evening; everything looks grey and cheerless now—you will see to-morrow how much brighter it will all appear."

"It is not only that," said Madelon, striving to check her sobs; "but just now, when we were sitting here, somehow I had forgotten all about where I was, and everything; and I thought I was out walking with papa, as I used to be, and I was planning what we would do to-morrow—and then all at once I remembered—and to-morrow I shall be in there, and I shall never see him again, and you will be gone too—oh, papa, papa——"

She was shaking all over with one of her sudden bursts of passionate crying? What could he do to console her? What could he say to comfort her? Not much, perhaps, but then much was not needed; only a few words commonplace enough, I daresay—but then, as we have said, Monsieur Horace's voice and words always had a wonderful influence with our little Madelon. How is it, indeed, that amidst a hundred tones that fret and jar on our ears, there is one kind voice that has power to calm and soothe us—amid a hundred alien forms, one hand to which we cling for help and support? Graham did not say much, and yet, as Madelon listened, her sobs grew less violent, her tears ceased, she began to control herself again. "Listen," said Graham, presently, "is not that singing that we hear? I think it must be the nuns."

Madelon raised her head and held her breath to listen; and sure enough, from within the convent came the sound of the voices of the nuns at their evening prayers. She listened breathlessly, a change came over her face, a light into her eyes, and she tightened her grasp of Graham's hand. The melancholy voices rising and falling in unison, seemed a pathetic, melodious interpretation of the inarticulate harmonies of the evening hour.

"I like that," said Madelon, relaxing her hold

as they ceased at last; "do you think they sing like that every evening, Monsieur Horace?"

"I have no doubt of it," he answered, "it is their evening service; see, that must be the chapel where the windows are lighted up."

"Perhaps they will let me sing too," said Madelon. "Ah, I shall like that—I love singing so much; do you think they will?"

"I think it very likely," said Horace; "but now, Madelon, we must be going towards home; it is almost quite dark, and we have a long walk before us."

Madelon was almost cheerful again now. She so readily seized the brighter side of any prospect, that it was only when the dark side was too forcibly presented to her that she would consent to dwell on it; and now the sound of the nuns singing had, unconsciously to herself, idealised the life that had appeared so dull and cheerless when viewed in connexion with the grey twilight, and had changed its whole aspect. When they reached the boulevards, where the lamps were all lighted now, and the people still walking up and down, it was she who proposed that they should sit down on one of the benches for a while.

"This is the last walk I shall have with you," she said, "for such a long, long time."

"Not so very long," said Graham, "you know I am to come and see you on my way back from Germany, and then if I can manage it, we will have another walk together."

"That will be very nice," said Madelon; and then, after a pause, she added, "Monsieur Horace, supposing Aunt Thérèse says she will not have me, what shall I do then?"

This very same question had, as we know, presented itself to Graham before now, and he had felt the full force of the possible difficulty that had now occurred to our unthinking Madelon for the first time.

"Indeed I do not know, Madelon," he answered, half laughing, "but I don't think we need be afraid; your aunt is not likely to turn you away."

"But if she did," persisted Madelon, "what should I do? Would you take me away to live with you?"

"With me?" said Graham, smiling, "I don't think that would quite do, Madelon; you know I am a soldiers' doctor, and have to go where they go, and could not have you following the regiment."

"Then you cannot come and go about as you please," said Madelon; "I thought you always went where you liked; you are not with the regiment now."

"No, I have a holiday just now; but that will come to an end in two or three weeks, and then I must do as I am bid, and go where I am told."

"And you have no home then? Ah, take me with you, Monsieur Horace, I should like to see the world—let me go with you."

"Would you like to put on a little red coat, and shoulder a musket and stand to be shot at?" says Graham, laughing at her. "I hope to see more of the world than you would quite like, I fancy, Madelon, that is, if we have any luck and get ordered out to the Crimea."

For indeed it was just the moment of the Crimean war, and while the events recorded in this little story were going on, the world was all astir with the great game in which kingdoms are staked, and a nation's destinies decided; treaties were being torn, alliances formed, armies marching, all Europe arming or standing at arms to prepare for the mighty struggle, and Graham, like many another young fellow, was watching anxiously to see whether,

in the great tide rolling eastward, some wave would not reach to where he stood, and sweep him away to the scene of action.

Madelon had not heard much about the Crimea, and did not very well know what Horace meant; but she understood the first part of his speech, and she, too, laughed at this picture of herself in a little red coat. Presently, however, she recurred to her original question.

"If you were not marching about, would you let me come and live with you?" she asked again.

"Indeed, I do not say that I would," said Graham, laughing, "and I don't mean to settle down for a long time yet; I have to make my fortune, you know."

"To make your fortune!" cries Madelon, pricking up her ears at the sound of the words, for indeed they had a most familiar ring in them; "why, I could do that for you," she added after a moment's pause.

"Could you?" said Graham absently; he did not follow out her thought in the least, and, in fact, hardly heard what she said, for the words were suggestive to him also, and carried with them their own train of ideas.

"Yes, and I will too," says Madelon, in one brief moment conceiving, weighing, and forming a great resolution. "Ah, I know how to do it—I know, and I will; I promise you, and I always keep my promises, you know. I promised papa that I would never become a nun, and I never will."

"Indeed, I cannot fancy you a nun at all," said Graham, rousing himself, and getting up. "Don't you think we had better be going back to the hotel now? It is getting quite late."

"And when your fortune is made, may I come and live with you?" said Madelon, without moving.

"We will see about that afterwards," he answered, smiling, "there is time enough to think about it, you may be sure. Come, Madelon, we must be going."

"Ah, you do not know, and I will not tell you," said Madelon, jumping up as she spoke.

"What do I not know?" asked Graham, taking her hand in his, as they walked off together.

"What I will do—it is my secret, but you will see—yes, you will see, I promise you that."

She almost danced with glee as she walked along

at Graham's side. He did not understand what she was talking about; he had missed the first sentence that might have given him the clue, and merely supposed that it was some childish mystery with which she was amusing herself.

But Madelon understood full well, and her busy little brain was full of plans and projects as she walked along. Make a fortune! how many fortunes had she not seen made in a day—in an hour! “Give me only ten francs, *et je ferai fortune!*” The old speech that she had quoted years ago to Horace Graham—though, indeed, she had no remembrance of having done so—was familiar to her now as then. Ah! she knew how fortunes were made, and Monsieur Horace did not—that was strange, but it was evident to her—and she would not tell him. Her superior knowledge on this point was a hidden treasure, for a great ambition had suddenly fired our ten-year-old Madelon. Not only in maturer years are great plans laid, great campaigns imagined, great victories fought for; within the narrow walls of many a nursery, on the green lawns of many a garden, the mimic fort is raised, the siege-train laid, the fortress stormed; and in many a tiny head the germs of the passions and ambitions and virtues of later years are already working out for themselves such paths as surrounding circumstances will allow

them to find. But Madelon's childhood had known neither nursery nor sheltered home-garden. Her earliest experiences had been amidst the larger ventures of life, the deeper interests that gather round advancing years; her playground had been the salons of the gayest watering-places in Europe, her playthings the roulette-board and the little gold and silver pieces that had passed so freely backwards and forwards on the long green tables where desperate stakes were ventured, and fortunes won and lost in a night; and it was amongst these that she now proposed to try her own little game of enterprise, and prepare this grand surprise for Monsieur Horace. The idea was an inspiration to her. Her whole soul was bound up in Horace Graham; I think she would willingly have laid down her life for him, and have thought little of the offering; a sort of *furore* of gratitude and devotion possessed her, and here at length was an opportunity for doing something for him—something he did not know how to do for himself, great and wise though he was, and this idea added not a little zest to the plan, in Madelon's opinion, one may be sure. Ah, yes, she knew what to do, she would go to the gambling-tables, as she had seen her father and his associates go scores of times; she would win money for him, she would make his fortune!

So Madelon schemed as she walked along by Graham's side, whilst he, for his part, had already forgotten her little speech, if indeed he had ever heard it.

So it is often—a few careless words between two people, quickly spoken, soon forgotten, by at least one of them—and yet, perhaps, destined to alter the course of two lives. Before they had reached the hotel Madelon had arranged not only the outline, but the details of her scheme. Spa was, as she well knew, but a short distance from Liége; she would at once beg her aunt to allow her to go over there for a day, or two days, if one were not enough, and then—why, once there, everything would be easy, and perhaps, even before Monsieur Horace came back from Germany, as he had said he would, all might be done, the promise redeemed, the fortune made! A most childish and childlike plan, founded so entirely on deductions drawn from experiences in the past, so wholly without reference to the probabilities of the future, and yet not the less the result of a fixed resolution in Madelon's mind, which no subsequent change in the mere details of carrying it out could affect. For, in her small undeveloped character lay latent an integrity and strength of will, a tenacity of purpose, which were already beginning to work, unconsciously, and

by instinct as it were, for she could assuredly never have learnt them from her father, who regarded honesty and integrity as merely inconvenient weaknesses incidental to human nature under certain conditions. But to Madelon they were precisely those sacred truths which lie hidden in our inmost hearts, and which, when once revealed to us, we cling to as our most steadfast law, and which to deny were to denounce our best and purest self. Not to every one are the same truths revealed with the same force; for the most part it is only through a searching experience that we can come clearly to understand one or another, which is to our neighbour as his most unerring instinct; and such must have been this integrity of purpose in Madelon, who, in affirming that she always kept her promises, had uttered no idle vaunt, nor even the proved result of such experience as her short life had afforded, but had simply given expression to what she instinctively knew to be the strongest truth in her nature.

That evening, after Madelon had gone up to bed, she stood long at her open window looking out into the night. Her bedroom was high up in the hotel, and overlooked a large public place; just opposite was a big, lighted theatre, and from where

she stood she could catch the sound of the music, and could fancy the bright interior, the gay dresses, the balcony, the great chandeliers, the actors, the stage. It was her farewell for many a long day to the scenes and pleasures of her past life, but she did not know it. The sound of the music stirred within her a sort of vague excitement, an indefinite longing, and she was busy peopling the future—a child's future, it is true, not extending beyond two or three weeks, but yet sufficient to make her forget the past for the moment. She must have stood there for nearly an hour; any one looking up might have wondered to see the little head popped out of window, the little figure so still and motionless. Up above the stars twinkled unheeded; down below other stars seemed to be dancing across the wide Place, but they were only the lamps of the carriages as they drove to and fro from the theatre. And yonder, on the outskirts of this busy town, with its lights and crowds and gay bustle, sleeping under the silent, slow-moving constellations, surrounded by the dark rustling trees, stands the still convent, where a narrow room awaits this dreaming eager little watcher. Our poor little Madelon! Not more difference between this gay, familiar music to which all her life has been set hitherto, and the melancholy

chant of the nuns, whose echoes have already passed from her memory, than between the future she is picturing to herself and the one preparing for her—but she does not know it.

CHAPTER V.

Mademoiselle Linders.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the next morning Graham once more started for the convent, this time, however, leaving Madelon at the hotel. He had written from Paris to the Superior immediately after her brother's death, but had received no reply. M. Linders' letter he had kept by him to deliver in person when he should have reached Liège.

Madelon was watching for his return, and ran to meet him with a most eager face.

"Have you seen my aunt?" she said. "Am I to go?"

"Yes, you are to go, Madelon," he said, looking down on her, and taking her hands in his. "I have seen your aunt, and we have agreed that it is best I should take you there this afternoon."

He sat down and gave her some little account of the interview he had had with her father's sister; not the whole, however, for he said nothing of his own feeling of disappointment in the turn that it

had taken, nor of the compassion that he felt for his little charge.

The fact of M. Linders having quarrelled with his sister had, on the whole, tended to prejudice the latter in his favour rather than otherwise, for M. Linders unfortunately seemed to have had a talent for quarrelling with every respectable friend and relation that he possessed; and it was with a strong hope of finding a good and kind guardian for Madelon in her aunt, that he had started for the convent. He wrote a few words of explanation on his card, and this, with M. Linders' letter, he sent in to the Lady Superior, and in return was requested to wait in the parlour till she should come to him. A key was handed to him, and he let himself into a large, square room, furnished with a table, a piano, and some straw chairs; a wooden grating shut off one end, within which were another table and more chairs; one or two prints of sacred subjects were on the walls, two large windows high up showed the tops of green trees in a sunny inner courtyard,—Graham had time to take in all these details before a door on the other side of the grating opened and the Lady Superior appeared.

Mademoiselle Linders had doubtless displayed a wise judgment in her choice of life; she could never under any circumstances have shone in society, but

there was something imposing in her tall figure in its straight black draperies, and the ease and dignity to which she could never have attained in a Paris salon, she had acquired without difficulty in her convent parlour. She had worked hard to obtain her present position, and she filled it with a certain propriety of air and demeanour. But her features were harsh, and her thin, worn face, so far as could be distinguished beneath the half-concealing black veil, wore a stern, discontented expression. Somehow, Graham already felt very sorry for little Madelon, as holding M. Linders' letter in one hand, the Superior approached the grating, and sitting down on the inner side, invited him by action, rather than words, to resume his chair on the other.

"If I am not mistaken, Monsieur," she began in a constrained, formal voice, "it was from you that I received a letter last week, announcing my brother's death?" Graham bowed.

"I thought it unnecessary to answer it," continued the Superior, "as you stated that you proposed coming to Liège almost immediately. If I understand rightly, you attended my brother in his last illness?"

"I did, Madame—it was a short one, as you are aware——"

“Yes, yes, an accident—I understood as much from your letter,” says Madame, dismissing that part of the subject with a wave of her hand; “and the little girl?”

“She is here—in Liège that is—we arrived last night.”

“In this letter,” says the Superior, slowly unfolding the paper, “with the contents of which you are doubtless acquainted, Monsieur——”

“I wrote it at M. Linders’ dictation, Madame.”

“Ah, exactly—in this letter then, I see that my brother wishes me to take charge of his child. I confess that, after all that has passed between us, I am at a loss to imagine on what grounds he can found such a request.”

“But—pardon me, Madame——” said Graham, “as your brother’s only surviving relative—so at least I understood him to say—you surely become the natural guardian of his child.”

“My brother and I renounced each other, and parted years ago, Monsieur; were you at all intimate with him?”

“Not in the least,” replied Graham; “I knew nothing, or next to nothing, of him, till I attended

him in his last illness; it was by the merest accident that I became, in any way, mixed up in his affairs."

"Then you are probably unaware of the character he bore," Thérèse Linders said, suddenly exchanging her air of cold constraint for a voice and manner expressive of the bitterest scorn; "he was a gambler by profession, a man of the most reckless and dissipated life; he plunged by choice into the lowest society he could find; he broke his mother's heart before he was one-and-twenty; he neglected, and all but deserted his wife; he ruined the lives of all who came in his way—he was a man without principle or feeling, without affection for any living being."

"Pardon me, Madame," Graham said again, "he was devotedly attached to his little daughter, and—and he is dead; to the dead much may surely be forgiven," for indeed at that moment his sympathies were rather with the man by whose death-bed he had watched than with the bitter woman before him.

"There is no question of forgiveness here," says Madame the Superior, with a slight change of manner; "I bear my brother no malice; it was not I that he injured, though he would doubtless have

done so had it been in his power. In separating myself from him, I felt that I was only doing my duty; but I have kept myself informed as to his career, and had I seen any change or hope of amendment, I might have made some steps towards reconciliation."

"And that step, Madame," Graham ventured to say, "was taken by your brother on his death-bed——"

"Are you alluding to this letter, Monsieur?" she inquired, crushing it in her hand as she spoke, "you have forgotten its contents strangely, if you imagine that I can consider that as a step towards reconciliation. My brother expresses no wish of the kind; he was no hypocrite at least, and he says with sufficient plainness, that he only turns to me as a last resource."

And, in fact, the letter was, as we know, couched in no very pleasant or conciliatory terms, and Graham was silenced for the moment. At last,——

"He appeals to your mother's memory on behalf of his child," he said.

"He does well to allude to our mother!" cried the Superior. "Yes, I recognise him there. He

does well to speak of her, when he knows that he broke her heart. She adored him, Monsieur. He was her one thought in life, when there were others who—who perhaps—but all that signifies little now. But in appealing to my mother's memory he suggests the strongest reason why, even now that he is dead, I should refuse to be reconciled to his memory."

Graham was confounded by her vehemence. What argument had he to oppose to this torrent of bitter words? Or how reason with such a woman as this—one with a show of right, too, on her side, as he was bound to own? He did not attempt it, but gave up the point at once, turning to a more practical consideration.

"If you are not disposed to take charge of your little niece, Madame," he said, "can you at least suggest any one in whose care she can be left? I promised her father to place her in your hands, but you must see it is impossible for me to take any further responsibility on myself. Even if I had the will, I have not at present the power."

"I never said I would not take charge of my niece, Monsieur," said the Superior.

And to what end then, wonders Graham, this grand tirade, this fine display of what to him could

not but appear very like hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness? To what end indeed? And yet, perhaps, not wholly unnatural. After five-and-twenty years of convent life, Thérèse Linders still clung to the memory of the closing scenes of her worldly career, as the most eventful in the dead level of a grey monotonous life, still held to the remembrance of her mother's death, and of her fierce quarrel with her brother, as the period when all her keenest emotions had been most actively called into play. And indeed what memories are so precious to us, which, in our profound egotism, do we cherish so closely, as those of the times which stirred our strongest passions to their depth, and which, gathering up, as it were, all lesser experiences into one supreme moment, revealed to us the intensest life of which we are capable? There are women who would willingly barter months of placid existence for one such moment, though it be a bitter one; and though Mademoiselle Linders was not one of these, or she would never have discovered that her vocation lay within the walls of a convent, she was, nevertheless, a woman capable of strong feelings, of vehement passions; and these had, perhaps, found their widest scope in the love, though it had been a wayward one, that she had felt for her mother, and in her intense jealousy of her brother. For a quarter

of a century these passions had lain dormant, crushed beneath the slow routine of daily duties; but these, in their unvarying monotony, had, on the other hand, made that lapse of years appear but as a few weeks, and kept the memory of those stormy scenes fresher than that of the events that, one by one, had crept into the convent life, and slowly modified its dull course. The news of her brother's death had affected her but little; but the sight of the familiar handwriting, the very framing of the sentences and choice of words, which had seemed to her like a fresh challenge even from his grave, had revived a thousand passions, jealousies, enmities, which one might have thought dead and buried for ever. What ghosts from old years that Graham could not see, what memories from her childhood and girlhood, what shadows from the old Paris life, were thronging round Thérèse Linders, as with changed name and dress she sat there in her convent parlour! Old familiar forms flitting to and fro, old voices ringing in her ears, her brother young, handsome, and indulged, herself plain, unprepossessing, neglected, and a mother whom she had held to and watched till the last, yet turning from her to the son who had scorned her wishes and broken her heart. It had all happened twenty-five years ago, but to the Superior it seemed but as yesterday. The old hatred

blazed up again, in the form, as it doubtless appeared to her, of an anger righteous even against the dead. Nor was the revival without its charms, with all its old associations of strife and antagonism—like a breeze blowing freshly from the outer world, and suddenly stirring the slow, creeping current of her daily life.

“I never said I would not take charge of my niece,” she said; “on the contrary, I have every intention of so doing. I only wish to make it clearly understood that my brother had no sort of claim upon me, and that I consider every line of this letter an insult.”

“His child, at least, is innocent,” began Graham.

“I am not likely to hold her responsible for her father’s misdeeds,” says Madame, drawing herself up. “I repeat that I am willing to receive my niece at once, though I cannot suppose that with the education and training she has received, she is likely to be anything but a burden and a care; however, that can be looked to and corrected!”

“Indeed you will find her a most innocent and loveable child,” pleaded Graham eagerly, and not without an inward dismay at the idea of our little

unconscious Madelon being looked to, and corrected by this grim woman; "she thinks her father was perfection, it is true, but it is through her total want of comprehension of his real character, and of the nature of his pursuits; and—believe me, Madame, it would be cruel to disturb that ignorance."

"She has nothing to fear from me in that respect," said the Superior coldly; "my brother might have spared the threats with which he insults me; his child will never hear his name mentioned by me. From the time she enters this house her past life is at an end; she must learn to forget it, and prepare for the future she will spend here."

"Not as a nun!" cried Graham involuntarily.

"And why not as a nun, Monsieur?"

"It was her father's last wish, his dying request that she should never become a nun: it was the fear of some such design on your part that made him hesitate about sending her to you, Madame. You must surely understand from his letter how anxious he is on that point."

"I see that he proposes an alternative that I cannot contemplate for a moment; it is not to train actresses that we receive pupils at the convent, Monsieur; and I have too much regard for my niece's

welfare not to prepare her for that life which on earth is the most peaceful and blessed, and which will win for its followers so rich a reward hereafter. But pardon me—I cannot expect you to agree with me on this point, and it is one that it is useless for us to discuss.”

She rose as she spoke, and Graham rose also; there was nothing more to be said.

“Then it only remains for me to bring Madelon here,” he said, “and hand over to you the sum of money which M. Linders left for her use.”

“That is all,” replied the Superior; “if you can bring her this afternoon I shall be ready to receive her. You must accept my thanks, Monsieur, for your kindness to her, and for the trouble you have taken.”

Graham, as he walked back to the hotel, was ready to vow that nothing should induce him to hand Madelon over to the care of her grim aunt. He understood now M. Linders’ reluctance to send her to his sister, and sympathised with it fully. Poor little Madelon, with her pretty, impulsive ways, her naïve ignorance,—Madelon, so used to be petted and indulged, she to be shut up within those dull walls, with that horrible, harsh, unforgiving woman,

to be taught, and drilled, and turned into a nun—he hated to think of it! He would take her away with him, he would hide her somewhere, he would send her to his sister who had half a dozen children of her own to look after, he would make his aunt adopt her—his aunt, who would as soon have thought of adopting the Great Mogul. A thousand impossible schemes and notions flitted through the foolish young fellow's brain as he walked along, chafed and irritated with his interview—all ending, as we have seen, in his coming into the hotel and telling Madelon she was to go to the convent that very afternoon. One thing indeed he determined upon, that against her own will she should never become a nun, if it were in his power to prevent it. He had promised her father not to lose sight of her, and, as far as he was able, he would keep his engagement.

He did not witness the meeting between his little charge and her aunt. He bade farewell to a tearful, half-frightened little Madelon at the door of the parlour, he saw it close upon her, and it was with quite a heavy heart that he turned away, leaving behind him the little girl who had occupied so large a share of his thoughts and anxieties during the last ten days. He had nothing to detain him in Liège now, and he left it the next morning, with

the intention of carrying out as much of his proposed tour as he should find practicable. His original intention had been to proceed from Paris to Strasbourg, and so into Switzerland, and over the Alps to the Italian lakes. So much of his holiday was already gone, however, that he gave up the idea of the lakes; but Switzerland might still be accomplished, and Strasbourg at any rate must be his first point, as it was there that, on leaving England, he had directed his letters to be sent in the first instance, and he expected to find them lying awaiting him.

He did find them, and their contents were such as to drive all thoughts of his tour out of his head. It was with a wild throb of excitement and exultation, such as he had never known before, that, on opening the first that came to hand, one that had been lying there for nearly a week, he read that the regiment to which he was attached was under immediate orders for the Crimea, and that he must return, without loss of time, to England. Even then, however, he did not forget little Madelon. He knew that she would be counting on his promised return, and could not bear the idea of going away without seeing her again, and wishing her good-bye. He calculated that he had still half a day to spare, and, notwithstanding his hurry, resolved to return

by Brussels rather than Paris, choosing those trains that would allow him to spend a couple of hours in Liège, and pay a visit to the convent.

It was only three days since he had last seen the white walls and grey roofs that were growing quite familiar to him now, and yet how life seemed to have changed its whole aspect to him—and not to him only, perhaps, but to somebody else too, who within those walls had been spending three of the saddest, dreariest days her small life had ever known.

When Graham asked for Madelon, he was shown, not into the parlour, but into a corridor leading to it from the outer door; straw chairs were placed here also, on either side of the grating that divided it down the middle, and on the inner side was a window looking into another and smaller courtyard. As Graham sat there waiting, an inner door opened and a number of children came trooping out; they were the *externes*, children of the bourgeois class for the most part, who came to school twice a-day at the convent; indeed they were the only pupils, the building not being large enough to accommodate boarders.

The children, laughing and chattering, vanished through the front door to disperse to their different

homes, and then, in a minute, the inner door opened again, and a small figure appeared; a nun followed, but she remained in the background, whilst Madelon came forward with a look of eager expectation on the *mignonne* face that seemed to have grown thinner and paler since Graham had last seen it only three days ago. His return, so much sooner than she had expected, had filled her with a sudden joy, and raised in her a vague hope, that she stood sadly in need of just then, poor child!

“So you see I have come back sooner than I expected, Madelon,” said Graham, taking the little hands that were stretched out to him so eagerly through the grating, “but I don’t know what you will say to me, for I shall not have time for the walk I promised you, when I thought I should stay two or three days in Liége. I must go away this afternoon, but I was determined not to leave without wishing you good-bye.”

“Go away this afternoon!” faltered Madelon, “then you are going away quite—and I shall never see you again!”

“Yes, yes, some day, I hope,” said Horace; “why, you don’t think I am going to forget you? My poor little Madelon, I am sorry to have startled you, but I will explain how it is,” and then he told

her how there was a great war going on, and he had been called away to join his regiment which was ordered out to the Crimea; "you know," he said smiling at her, "I told you it would never do for you to come marching about with me, and running the chance of being shot at."

He tried to speak cheerfully, but indeed it was not easy with that sad little face before him. Madelon did not answer; she only leant her head against the wooden bars of the grating, and sobbed in the most miserable, heart-broken way. It made Graham quite unhappy to see her.

"Don't cry so, Madelon," he kept on saying, almost as much distressed as she was, "I cannot bear to see you cry." And indeed he could not, for the kind-hearted young fellow had a theory that children and dogs and birds and all such irresponsible creatures should be happy as the day is long, and there seemed something too grievous in this overpowering distress in little Madelon. She checked herself a little presently, however, drawing back one hand to wipe away her tears, while she clung to him tightly with the other. He began to talk to her again as soon as she was able to listen, saying everything he could to cheer and encourage her, telling her what he was going to do, and how he would write

to her, and she must write to him, and tell him all about herself, and how she must be a good little girl, and study very hard, and learn all sorts of things, and how he would certainly come back some day and see her.

“When?” asks Madelon.

“Ah, that I cannot tell you, but before very long I hope, and meantime you must make haste and grow tall—let me see how tall shall I expect you to be? as tall as that——” touching one of the bars above her head.

She tried to smile as she answered, “It would take me a long time to grow as tall as that.”

“Not if you make haste and try very hard,” he said; “and by that time you will have learnt such a number of things, music, and geography, and sewing, and—what is it little girls learn?” So he went on talking; but she scarcely answered him, only held his hands tighter and tighter, as if she was afraid he would escape from her. Something seemed to have gone from her in these last few days, something of energy, and spirit, and hopefulness; Horace had never seen her so utterly forlorn and downcast before, not even on the night of her father’s death.

At last he looked at his watch. "I must go, Madelon," he said, "I have to catch the train."

"No, no, don't go!" she cried, suddenly starting from her desponding attitude, "don't go and leave me, I cannot stay here—I cannot—don't go!"

She was holding him so tightly that he could not move, her eyes fixed on his face with an intensity of pleading. He was almost sorry that he had come at all.

"My poor little Madelon," he said, "I must go—I must, you know—there—there, good-bye, good-bye."

He squeezed the little hands that were clinging so desperately to him, again and again, and then tried gently to unloose them; suddenly she relaxed her hold, and flung herself away from him. Graham hastened away without another word, but as he reached the door he turned round for one more look. Madelon had thrown herself down upon the low window-seat, her face buried in her folded arms, her frame shaking with sobs; the nun had come forward and was trying to comfort her—the bare grey walls, the black dresses, the despairing little figure crouching there, and outside the courtyard all aglow in the afternoon sunshine, with pigeons whir-

ring and perching on the sloping roofs, spreading their wings against the blue sky—it was a little picture that long lived in Graham's memory. Poor little Madelon!

CHAPTER VI.

In the Convent.

NOT till Monsieur Horace was indeed gone, and there was no longer any hope of seeing him return, not till the last door was closed between them, the last link broken with the outer world, not till then perhaps did our little Madelon begin to comprehend the change that one brief fortnight had worked in her whole life. Till now, she had scarcely felt the full bitterness of her father's death, or understood that the old, happy, bright, beautiful life was at an end for ever. These last days had been so full of excitement, she had been so hurried from one new sensation to another, that she had not had time to occupy herself exclusively with this great sorrow that had fallen upon her; but there was nothing to distract her now. Her father's death, which she had found so hard to understand in the midst of everyday life and familiar associations, she realized all too bitterly when such realization was aided by the blank convent walls and the dull convent routine;

the sorrow that had been diverted for a moment by another strong predominant feeling, returned with overwhelming force when on every side she saw none but strange faces, heard none but unfamiliar voices; liberty, and joy, and affection seemed suddenly to have taken to themselves wings and deserted her, and she was left alone with her desolation.

The child was half-crazed in these first days in the extremity of her grief; the nuns tried to console her, but she was at first beyond consolation. She did not know what to do with her sense of misery, her hopeless yearning, with the sudden darkness which had fallen upon her bright life, and where she was left to grope without one hand stretched out by which she could reach back as it were, into the past, and grasp some familiar reality that should help her to a comprehension of this strange new world in which she found herself. We hear often enough of the short life of childish troubles, quickly excited, and as quickly forgotten—true enough perhaps of the griefs isolated, so to speak, in the midst of long days of happiness. But the grief that is not isolated? The grief over which the child cries itself to sleep every night, and which wakes with it in the morning, saddening and darkening

with its own gloom the day which ought to be so joyous? In such a grief as this, there is, perhaps, for the time it lasts, no sorrow so sad, so acute, so hopeless, as a child's. For us, who with our wide experience have lived through so much, and must expect to live through so much more, a strength has risen up out of our very extremity, as we have learnt to believe in a beyond, in a future that must succeed the darkest hour. But a child, as a rule, has neither past nor future; it lives in the present. The past lies behind, already half forgotten in to-day's happiness or trouble; the future is utterly wide, vague, and impracticable, in nowise modifying or limiting the sorrow which, to its unpractised imagination, can have no ending. When a child has learnt to live in the past, or the future, rather than in the present, it has learnt one of the first and saddest of life's experiences—a lesson so hard in the learning, so impossible to unlearn in all the years to come.

A lesson that our Madelon, too, must soon take to heart, in the midst of such dreary distasteful surroundings, with a past so bright to look back upon, with a future which she can fill with any amount of day-dreams, of whatever hue she pleases—a lesson therefore, which she is not long in acquiring, but with the too usual result, a most

weary impatience of the present. The first violence of her grief exhausted itself in time, as was only natural, and something of her old energy and spirit began to show itself again; but the change was not much for the better. She did not mope nor pine, that was not her way; but she became possessed with a spirit of restless petulance, which at first, indeed, was only another phase of unhappiness, but which, not being recognized as such, presently developed into a most decided wilfulness. She turned impatiently from the nun's well-meant kindness and efforts to console her, which somehow were not what she wanted—not that, but something so different, poor child!—she was cross, peevish, fractious without intending it, scarcely knowing why; the nuns set her down as a perverse unamiable child: and so it happened, that she had not been many weeks in the convent before she came to be regarded with general disfavour and indifference instead of with the kindly feeling that had at first been shown to the forlorn little stranger.

Graham had indeed wasted some pity on her, in imagining her under the immediate control of her aunt. The Superior had far too many things to think about for her to trouble herself with any direct superintendence of her little niece; Madelon hardly ever saw her, and in fact, of the convent

life in general she knew but little. Her lessons she soon began to do with the other children in the class, and for the rest she was placed under the special care of one of the younger Sisters, Sœur Lucie by name.

Like Madelon, Sœur Lucie had been brought, a little ten-year-old orphan to the convent, to be under the care of one of the nuns who was her aunt; and it was, perhaps, on this account, that she was chosen by Mademoiselle Linders as a sort of *gouvernante* for her niece. But there was no other resemblance between this placid, fair-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Flemish girl, whose early recollections were all of farms and farmyards, of flat grassy meadows watered by slow moving streams, of red cows feeding tranquilly in rich pastures, of milking, and cheese-making, and butter-making, of dairies with shining pots and pans and spotless floors, and our vehement brown-eyed Madelon, who in her ten years had seen more of the world than Sœur Lucie was likely to see if she lived to be a hundred. Sœur Lucie had passed a happy, peaceful childhood in the convent, and, as she grew up into girlhood, had listened submissively to the words of exhortation which urged her to give up the world and its vanities, which she had never known, and by such voluntary renunciation to pass from a state of mere negative virtue

into that one of superior holiness only to be attained beneath the nun's veil, and behind the convent grating. She took the vows as soon as she was old enough, endowed the convent with her fortune, and was perfectly happy. She had neither friends nor relations outside this little world in which she had been brought up, and she desired nothing beyond what it could afford her. She had, as she well knew, secured for herself in the next world a sure compensation for any little sacrifices she might have made in this—a reflection that often consoled her under a too prolonged course of prayer and meditation, for which, to say the truth, she had little aptitude—and for the rest, she was universally allowed to be the best compote-maker (the nuns were famous for their compotes, which were in great demand), the best embroiderer, the best altar-decorator in the convent. What more could be expected or demanded of life? Sœur Lucie, at any rate, was quite satisfied with her position, and this perfectly simple-minded, good-tempered little sister was a general favourite. Madelon could not have fallen into kinder hands; Sœur Lucie, if not always very wise, was at least very good-natured, and if she did not win much respect or admiration from our little Madelon, who was not long in discovering that she knew a great deal about a great many

things that the nun had never heard or dreamt of, the poor child at least learnt to recognize hers as a friendly face, and to turn to her in these dreary days.

The convent was neither very large nor very wealthy. The building itself had formerly been a château-farm, which, with its sheds and outlying buildings, had, many years ago, been converted with considerable alterations into its present form; rooms had been partitioned off, a little chapel had been built, the hall turned into a refectory, the farm-yard and orchard into a pleasant sunny garden with lawn, and flower-beds, and shrubs, with vines and fruit-trees alternating with creepers along the old walls. As for the sisters, few were from the upper ranks of society, belonging for the most part, rather to the middle and bourgeois class. Mademoiselle Linders had gained her present position not less by her superior birth and education, than by that to which she would more willingly have attributed her elevation—a certain asceticism of life which she affected, an extra observance of fasts and vigils, which the good nuns looked upon with reverence, without caring to emulate such peculiar sanctity in their own persons. The rule was not a strict one, nor, though the Superior was careful to enforce it to its utmost rigour, was the life one of particular

hardship or privation. They were a simple, kind, good-hearted set, these Sisters, having their little disputes, and contentions, and jealousies among themselves occasionally, no doubt, but leading good, peaceable lives on the whole, with each day and hour well filled with its appointed tasks, leading through a continual, not useless round of embroidery, teaching, compote-making, and prayers.

Perhaps some one looking round on them, with their honest, homely Belgian faces, would have tried to imagine some history for them, in accordance with the traditions that cling about convent walls, and associate themselves with the very mention of a nun; and most likely they would have been all wrong. None of these Sisters had had very eventful lives, and they had, for the most part, dropped into their present mode of existence quite naturally. With little romance to look back upon, save such as finds a place in even the homeliest life, with an imperfect middle-class education that had failed to elevate the mind, or give it wide conceptions of life, and religion, and duty, a certain satisfaction at having done with secular life and its cares, and at having their future here and hereafter comfortably provided for, was perhaps the general tone amongst this prosaic, unimaginative community. We are, indeed, far from affirming that in that little society there was no

higher tone of religious enthusiasm, that there were not some who not only found their highest religious ideal in the life they had chosen, but to whom it formed, in fact, the highest ideal to which they could attain, and calculated, therefore, to develop in them the best and noblest part of their natures. To such, the appointed, monotonous round, the unquestioning submission to the will of another, the obedience at once voluntary and enforced, would not only bring a gracious sense of repose after conflict, but, by satisfying their religious cravings and aspirations, by demanding the exercise of those virtues which appeared to them at once the highest and the most attainable, would give peace to souls which, in the world's active life, would have tossed for ever to and fro in reckless unquiet warfare, nor have ever once perceived that in such warfare they might, after all, be fulfilling the noblest ends. "Peace, and rest, and time for heavenly meditation," they had cried, stretching out weary hands to this quiet little harbour of refuge, and perhaps—who knows?—they had there found them.

Such, then, was this little world in which our Madelon suddenly found herself placed to her utter bewilderment at first, so alien was it to all her former experiences, so little could she understand of its meaning, its aims, its spirit and intention; no

more than, as it seemed to her, those around her understood her, or her wants and wishes. To her, the convent only appeared inexpressibly *triste* and dreary, a round of dull tasks, enlivened by duller recreations, day after day, for ever bounded by those blank, grey walls—no change, no variety, no escape. The bare, scantily-furnished rooms, the furniture itself, the food, the nuns' perpetual black dress, and ungraceful headgear,—Madelon hated them all, as she gradually recovered from her first desolation, and became alive again to external impressions; and, as the first keenness of her sorrow wore off, this vague sense of general unhappiness and discomfort showed itself in an attitude of opposition and defiance to every one and everything around her. From being helplessly wretched and cross, she became distinctly naughty, and before long our Madelon had drifted into the hopeless position of a child always refractory, always in disgrace, a position from which, when once assumed, it is almost impossible for the small hapless delinquent to struggle free.

That Madelon was very naughty cannot be denied, and the fact surprised no one so much as herself. The nuns, accustomed to all sorts of children of every variety of temper, of every shade of docility and wilfulness, of cleverness and stupidity, found

nothing astonishing in one more perverse little specimen, but Madelon could not understand it at all. She was not used to feeling naughty, and did not know what it meant at first. In her life hitherto, when she had been as happy as the day is long, she had had singularly few opportunities for exercising the privilege of every child of Adam, and exhibiting her original waywardness. But it was far otherwise now, and she could not understand why she always felt cross, always obstinate, always perverse; she only knew that she was very miserable, and it was quite a discovery to be told one day that it was because she was naughty, and that if she were good, she would be happy.

“I always am good,” said Madelon, firing up, and speaking from the experience of former days, “and I am not at all happy—I never shall be here.”

But alas! it was proved too clearly that she was not at all good, and indeed she began to think so herself, only she did not see how she could help it.

Madelon got into great disgrace in the very first weeks after her arrival at the convent, and this was the occasion of it. The only room vacant for her was a cell that had been occupied by a sister who

had died a short time previously, a sister of a devout turn of mind, who had assisted her meditations by the contemplation of a skull of unusual size and shininess. The cell was a cheerful, narrow little room, looking out on the convent garden, and the first pleasant sensation that Madelon knew in the convent was when she was taken into it, and saw the afternoon sun shining upon its white-washed walls, and the late climbing roses nodding in at the open window; but she became possessed with a perfect horror of the skull. She discovered it the first evening when she was going to bed, and was quite glad to pop her head under the bed-clothes, to shut out all sight and thought of it. But awaking again that first night in her grief and loneliness, she saw a stray moonbeam shining in, and lighting it up into ghastly whiteness and distinctness, as it stood on a little bracket against the wall beneath a tall wooden crucifix. For the first minute she was half paralysed with terror; she lay staring at it without power to move, and then she would assuredly have run to some one for protection had she known to whom to go, or, indeed, had she not been too terrified to do more than hide her head under the counterpane again. From that time it became a perpetual nightmare to her. By day its terrors were less apparent, though even then, with her innate

love for all things bright, and joyous, and pleasant, it was a positive grief to her to have such a grim object before her eyes whenever she came into the room; but at night no sooner was she in bed, and the light taken away, than her imagination conjured up a hundred frightful shapes, that all associated themselves with the grinning death's-head. In vain she covered it up, in vain she shut her eyes—sleeping or waking it seemed always there. At length she could bear it no longer, and entreated piteously that it might be taken away; but Sœur Lucie, to whom the little prayer was made, did not view the matter in at all the same light as Madelon. In the first place, it formed part of the furniture of the room, and had always been there, so far as she knew—which, to the nun, whose life was founded on a series of unquestioned precedents, allowing of nothing arbitrary but the will of the Superior, appeared an unanswerable reason why it should always remain; and, in the next place, with the lack of sympathy that one sometimes remarks in unimagina-tive minds, she did not in the least understand the terror with which it inspired the child, but assured her, in her good-humoured way, that that was all nonsense, and that she would get over it in time. So the skull remained, and Madelon was miserable, till one night, in a moment of desperation, she

jumped out of bed, seized it with both hands, and flung it with all her might through the window into the garden below. She was frightened when she heard the crash of falling glass, for in her excitement she had never stopped to open the window, but greatly relieved, notwithstanding, to think that her enemy was gone, and slept more soundly that night than she had done for a long time previously.

Next morning, however, Madelon had a cold, a pane of glass was found in fragments on the gravel walk beneath the window, a skull was discovered, lying among the long grass on the lawn; one can fancy the exclamations, the inquiries, the commotion. Madelon, though not a little frightened, avowed boldly enough what she had done, and so far gained her end that the skull never reappeared, and a safe precedent was established for Sœur Lucie's future guidance; but she got into great trouble at the time, and gained moreover the unenviable distinction of having committed a deed of unparalleled audacity. After this, what might not be expected of such a child? The nuns at once formed a bad opinion of her, which they owed it to themselves to confirm on the occasion of each succeeding offence, by a reference to this past misdeed which had first taught them of what enormities she was capable.

Matters were no better when there came to be a question of lessons. Madelon did not mind the actual learning, though she wearied a little of the continued application to which she was unused; but she resented to the last degree the astonishment that her ignorance on all sorts of subjects excited both in the nuns who taught her, and in the other children in the class, and which was expressed with sufficient distinctness. "Never studied geography, nor history, nor arithmetic!" cries Sœur Ursule, who superintended the school; "not know the principal cities in Europe, nor the kings of France, nor even your multiplication table!" These speeches, with strongly implied notes of admiration after each sentence, and illustrated by the expression on the faces of a small, open-mouthed audience in the background, roused Madelon's most indignant feelings; she rebelled alike against the injustice of being held up to public reprobation for not knowing what she had never been taught, and against the imputations cast upon her education hitherto. "I can do a great many things you cannot," she would answer defiantly, "I can talk English, and German, and Italian—you can't; I can dance—you can't; I can sing songs, and—and, oh! a great many things that you cannot do!" A speech of this sort would bring our poor Madelon into dire disgrace we may be sure; and then angry, impenitent,

she would go away into some corner, and cry—oh! how sadly—for her father, for the happy old days, for Monsieur Horace, too, perhaps, to come back, and take her out of all this misery.

Behind the convent was a strip of ground, which produced cabbages and snails on one side, and apple-trees on the other; a straight walk divided these useful productions from each other. When Madelon was *en pénitence* she used sometimes to be sent to walk here alone during the hour of recreation, and would wander disconsolately enough among the apple-trees, counting the apples by way of something to do, and getting intimately acquainted with the snails and green caterpillars amongst the cabbages. Our poor little Madelon! I could almost wish that we had kept her always in that pretty green valley where we first saw her; but I suppose in every life there come times when cabbages, or things of no cheerfuller aspect than cabbages, are the only prospect, and this was one of her times. She used to feel very unhappy and very lonely as she paced up and down, thinking of the past—ah, how far that past already lay behind her, how separate, how different from anything she did, or saw, or heard in these dull days! She did not find many friends to console her in her troubles; good-natured Sœur Lucie did indeed try to comfort her when she found her

crying, and though she was not very successful in her efforts, Madeleine began to give her almost as much gratitude as if she had been. Sœur Lucie could not think of anything to tell her but that she was very naughty, and must try to be good, which Madelon knew too well already. It would have been more to the purpose, perhaps, if she had told her she was not so very bad after all, but Sœur Lucie never thought of that; perhaps she did not care much about the child; by this time Madelon was beginning to be established as the black sheep of the little community, and Sœur Lucie only expressed the general sense; but being very good-natured, she said in a kind way what other people said disagreeably.

Neither from her companions did she meet with much sympathy, and, indeed, when out of disgrace, Madelon was apt to be rather ungracious to her schoolfellows, with whom she had little in common. The children who came daily to the convent were of two classes—children of the poor and children of a higher bourgeois grade, shopkeepers for the most part. Madelon was naturally classed with the latter of these two sets during the lesson hours, but she stood decidedly aloof from them afterwards, at first through shyness, and then with a sort of wondering disdain. She had never been used to children's

society; all her life her father had been careful to keep her apart from companions of her own age, and, accustomed to associate continually with grown-up people, she chose to regard with great contempt the trivial chatter, and squabbles, and amusements of her small contemporaries. After a time, indeed, she condescended to astonish their minds with some of her old stories, and was gratified by the admiration of a round-eyed, open-mouthed audience, who listened with rapt attention as she related some of the glories of past days, balls, and theatres, and kursaals, princes and counts, and fine dresses; it served in some sort to maintain the sense of superiority which was sorely tried during the untoward events of the lesson hours; but this also was destined to come to an end. One day there was a whispering among her listeners, which resulted in the smallest of them saying boldly,—

“Marie-Louise says your papa must have been a very bad man.”

“What!” cries Madelon, jumping off the high stool on which she had been seated. This little scene took place during the hour of recreation, when the children ate their luncheon of bread and fruit.

“Ah, yes,” says Marie-Louise, a broad-faced, flaxen-haired damsel, half a head taller than Madelon,

and nodding her head knowingly. "Those are very fine stories that you tell us there, Mademoiselle, but when I related them at home they said it was clear your papa must have been a very wicked man."

Madelon turned quite white and walked up to the girl, her teeth set, her small fists clenched. "*You* are wicked!" she stammered out; "how dare you say such things? I—I will never speak to you again!" and then she turned, and walked off without another word.

The matter did not end here, however, for the children talked of it among themselves, the nuns heard of it, and, finally, it reached the ears of Madame la Supérieure herself. Madelon, summoned into the awful presence of her aunt, received the strictest orders never again to refer to these past experiences in any way. "You are my child now," says Madame, overwhelming the poor little culprit before her with her severest demeanour, "and must learn to forget all these follies." If Madelon feared any one, it was her aunt, who had never cared to win her little niece's love by any show of affection; the child came before her trembling, and escaped from her gladly. She had no inclination to draw down further reprimands by disobedience in this particular, so far as words went, nor indeed had she any temptation to do so. From this time she kept

more apart from the rest of the children, rarely joining in their games, and preferring even Sœur Lucie's society to that of her small companions. So, altogether, Madelon's first attempts at a convent life were not a success, and time only brought other sad deficiencies to light.

Whatever the nuns may have thought or said, concerning her ignorance of history, geography, and arithmetic, it was a far more serious matter when there came to be a question of her religious knowledge. The good sisters were really horrified at the complete blank they found, and lost no time in putting her through a course of the most orthodox instruction. Before she had been a month in the convent, she knew almost as much as Nanette, had learnt why people go to church and what they do there, had studied her catechism, could find her places in her prayer-book, could repeat Ave Marias and Paternosters, and tell her beads like every one else. And so Madelon's questions are answered at last, her perplexities solved, her yearnings satisfied! She apprehended quickly all that she was taught, so far as in her lay, and vaguely perceived something still beyond her powers of apprehension, something that still confusedly connected itself with the great church, with the violinist's playing, with the pictures and the music of old days, and which, for the present,

in her new life, found its clearest expression, not in the nuns' teaching, for, kind and affectionate as it in truth was, it was marred from the first to Madelon by the inevitable exclamation of wonder and horror that she should not know all about it already—not in the questions and answers in her catechism, nor in the religious dogmas and formulas which she accepted, but could hardly appreciate—not in all these, but in the little chapel with its gaudy altars, and twinkling lights, its services, and music, and incense. Indeed, apart from all higher considerations, the pictures, the colouring, the singing, all were the happiest relief to the child, who, used to perpetual change and brightness, wearied indescribably of the dull, colourless life, the uniform dress, the want of all artistic beauty in the convent. Her greatest reward when she had been good was to be allowed to join in the singing in the chapel—her greatest punishment, to be banished from the evening services.

No need, however, to pursue this part of little Madelon's history further. With the nuns' instruction, and the learning of her catechism, vanished all that had distinguished her, in this respect, from other children of her years and station. She had learnt most of what can be learnt by such teaching, and for her, as for others, there remained the verifying and realization of these lessons, according to her

capacity and experience. Only, one may somehow feel sure, that to this passionate, wilful little nature, religion would hardly present itself as one simple, sublime truth, high, pure, and serene as the over-arching, all-embracing heaven, through which the sun shines down on the clashing creeds of men; but rather as a complex, many-sided problem, too often at variance with her scheme of life, to be felt after through the medium of conflicting emotions, to be worked out at last through what doubts, questionings, with what perplexities, strivings, yearnings, cries for light—along this in nowise singular path, no need to follow our little Madelon.

For the rest, she imbibed readily enough at this time many of the particular views of religious subjects affected by the nuns, at first, indeed, not without a certain incredulity that such things could be, when her father had never spoken to her about them, nor made her aware of their existence; but presently, with more confidence, as she remembered that he was to have told her all about them when she was older. There were the legends and histories of the saints, for instance, in which Madelon learnt to take special delight, though it may be feared that she regarded them rather as pretty romantic stories, illustrated and glorified by her recollections of the old pictures in Florence, than as the

vehicle of religious instruction that the nuns would willingly have made them. She used to beg Sœur Lucie to tell them to her again and again, and the good little nun, delighted to find at least one pious disposition in her small rebellious charge, was always ready to comply with her request, and went over the whole list of saints and their lives, not sparing one miracle or miraculous virtue we may be sure, and telling them all in her simple, matter-of-fact language, with details drawn from her daily life to give a touch of reality, which invested the mystic old Eastern and Southern legends with a quaint naïve homeliness not without its own charm—like the same subjects as interpreted by some of the old Dutch and Flemish masters, in contrast with the high-wrought, idealised conceptions of the earlier Italian schools. But it was through the medium of these last that Madelon saw them all pass before her—St. Cecilia, St. Catherine, St. Dorothea, St. Agnes, St. Elizabeth—she knew them all by name. Sœur Lucie almost changed her opinion of Madelon when she discovered this—for about a day and a half that is, till the child's next flagrant delinquency—and Madelon found a host of recollections in which she might safely indulge, as she chatted to Sœur Lucie about the pictures, and galleries, and churches of Florence, not a little pleased when the nun's ex-

clamations and questions revealed that she herself had never seen but two churches in her life, that near her old home and the convent chapel.

“Oh, I have seen a great many,” Madelon would say, “and palaces too; I daresay you never saw a palace either? but I like the churches best because of the chapels, and altars, and tombs, and pictures. At Florence the churches were so big—oh! as big as the whole convent—but I think the chapel here very pretty too; will you let me help you to decorate the altar for the next fête, if I am good?”

So she chattered on, and these were her happiest hours perhaps. Sometimes she would be allowed to accompany Sœur Lucie to the big kitchen, and assist in the grand compote-making, which seemed to be going on at all seasons of the year. There, sometimes helping, sometimes perched on her favourite seat on the corner of the table, Madelon would forget her sorrows for awhile in the contemplation of the old farm-kitchen with its rough white-washed walls, decorated with pots and pans, and shining kettles, its shelves with endless rows of blue and white crockery, its great black rafters crossing below the high-pitched ceiling leaving a gloomy space, full of mystery to Madelon’s imagination; and then, below, the long white wooden table, the

piles of fruit, the busy figures of the nuns as they moved to and fro. Outside in the courtyard the sun would be shining perhaps, the trees would wave, and cast flickering shadows on Madelon as she sat, the pigeons would come fluttering and perching on the window-sill, and Sœur Lucie, whilst paring, cutting, boiling, skimming, would crone out for Madelon's benefit the old tales she knew so well that she could almost have repeated them in her sleep. Madelon only begged to be let off the tragical ending, which she could not bear, at last always stopping her ears when the critical moment of the sword, or the wheel, or the fire approached. She took great interest in the history of Ste. Thérèse, especially in the account of her running away in her childhood, which seemed to her most worthy of imitation—only, thinks Madelon, she would have taken care not to have been caught, and brought back again. The subsequent history of the saint she found less edifying; nothing that savoured of conventual life found favour in Madelon's eyes in these days; and indeed her whole faith in saints and legends was rudely shaken one day by a broad and somewhat reckless assertion on the part of Sœur Lucie, that all the female saints had been nuns—an assertion certainly unsupported by the facts, whether legendary or ascertained, but which had somehow become a fixed

idea in Sœur Lucie's mind, and was dear to the heart of the little nun.

"They were not nuns like you, then," says Madelon at last, after some combating of the point, "for they could go out, and walk about, and do a great many things you must not do—and if I were a saint, I would never, never become a nun!"

"But it is the nuns that have become saints," cries Sœur Lucie, with the happiest conviction; and Madelon, unable to argue out her own ideas on the subject, contented herself with repeating, that anyhow they had not all been nuns like Sœur Lucie, which was indisputable.

These were, as we have said, Madelon's happiest times, and, indeed, they hardly repaid the child for long days of weariness and despondency, for hours of heart-sick longing for she knew not what, of objectless hoping, of that saddest form of home-sickness, that knows of no home for which to pine. In all the future there was but one point on which her mind could rest—Monsieur Horace's promised return, and that was too vague, too remote to afford her much comfort. And her own promise to him, had she forgotten that? She would not have been the Madelon that we know if she had done so, but we need hardly say that she had not been two days in

the convent, before she instinctively perceived how futile were all those poor little schemes with which she had been so busy the evening before she parted with Graham, how impossible it would be to ask or obtain her aunt's permission for going to Spa on such an errand. The convent was to all intents and purposes a prison to our little Madelon, and she could only wait and cherish her purpose till a happier moment.

She heard twice from Graham in the first few months. He wrote just before leaving England, and once from the Crimea; but this last letter elicited an icy response from the Superior, to the effect generally that her niece being now under her care, and receiving the education that would fit her for the life that would be hers for the future, she wished all old connections and associations to be broken off; in short, that it would be useless for Graham to write any more letters, as Madelon would not be allowed to see them. Graham received this letter at Balaklava, at the end of a long day's work, and laughed out loud as he read the stiff, formal little epistle, which, to the young man in the midst of the whirl and bustle of camps and hospitals, seemed like a voice from another world; there was something too ludicrous in the notion of a child of eleven years old being forbidden to receive letters, because

she might possibly be a nun nine or ten years hence.

“As for that, we’ll see about it by-and-by, old lady,” he said to himself, “but in the meantime there is no use in writing letters that are not to be delivered;” and then he thrust Mademoiselle Linders’ letter into his pocket, and thought no more about it.

So Madelon heard nothing more of Monsieur Horace, though she often, often thought of him, and wondered what he was doing. He was very busy, very hard-worked; an army-surgeon had no sinecure in the Crimea in those days, as we know, and it was perhaps well for the child, who cared more for him than for any one else in the world, that she knew nothing of his life at this time, of wintry battle-fields and hospital tents, of camps and trenches, where, day and night, he had to fight his own battle with sickness, and wounds, and death. No news from the war came to Madelon’s ears, no whisper from all the din and clamour that were filling Europe, penetrated to this quiet, out-of-the-world, little world in which her lot was cast. The mighty thunder of the guns before Sebastopol rolled, echoing, to the north, and roused sunny cities basking in the south, and stirred a million hearts in the far islands of the west; but it died away before the

vine-covered gate, the white-washed walls of the little Belgian convent. There life stole on at an even pace, little asked of it, yielding little in return, and amongst that peaceful Sisterhood, one little restless spirit, ever seeking and feeling after what she could not find, looking in the faces of all around her, if so be some one could help her, and, with a child's instinct, rejecting each in turn.

END OF VOL. I.

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MY LITTLE LADY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

MY LITTLE LADY.

CHAPTER VII.

Fever.

FOR more than two uneventful years Madelon remained in the convent; but early in the third spring after her arrival, a low fever broke out, which for the time completely disturbed the peaceful, even current of existence there, and, by its results, altered, as it happened, the whole course of her own life.

She was between twelve and thirteen then, and had grown into a slim little maiden, rather tall for her age, with a little pale face as in old days, but with her wavy brown hair all braided now, and fastened in long plaits round her head. In these two years she has become somewhat reconciled to her convent life; not, indeed, as a permanent arrangement—it never occurred to her to regard it in that light—but as something that must be endured till a new future should open out before her. She learns her lessons, sings in the chapel, knows some-

thing of compote-making, and can embroider with skilful little fingers almost after Sœur Lucie's own heart. She still holds aloof from her companions, turning to Sœur Lucie for society, though rather with the feeling of the simple-hearted little nun being *bon camarade*, than with any deeper sentiment of friendship or respect. She is rarely *en pénitence* now; the vehement little spirit seems laid; and if something of her old spring and energy have gone with it, if she is sometimes sad, and almost always quiet, there is no one to note it much, or to heed the change that has apparently come over her. And yet Madelon was in truth little altered, and was scarcely less of a child than when Graham had brought her to the convent. She had learned a variety of things, it is true; she could have named all the principal cities in Europe now; and though she still stumbled over the kings of France, her multiplication-table was unexceptionable; but her education had been one of acquisition rather than of development. Her mind had not yet had time to assimilate itself with those around her, nor to become reconciled to the life that was so at variance with all her old traditions; and she maintained a nucleus, as it were, of independent thought, which no mere extraneous influences or knowledge could affect. In the total silence imposed upon herself, and those

around her, concerning her past life, there had been no possibility of modifying her ideas on that subject, and they were still at the same point as when she entered the convent. She still clung to her father's memory, with all the passionate love of which her ardent little soul was capable; she still believed in his perfection, and held to her recollections of the old days with a strength and tenacity only enhanced by the contrast which her present life daily forced upon her. The past lived in her memory as a bright, changeful dream, varying from one pleasure to another, with an ever-shifting background of fair, foreign towns and cities, Kursaals, palaces, salons, gardens, mountains, and lakes, and quiet green nooks of country—all, as it seemed to her, with the power of generalization that seizes on the most salient points, and takes them as types of the whole, shining in sunlight that never clouded, under clear blue skies that never darkened. Madelon knew that that time had gone by for ever; and yet, in all her dreams for the future, her imagination never went beyond a repetition of it all—only for her father she, perhaps, substituted Monsieur Horace: for Monsieur Horace, we may be sure, was not forgotten, any more than her promise to him; though, indeed, this last had been so long in abeyance that she had ceased to think of it as likely to be speedily

fulfilled. She had almost come to regard it as one of the many things referred to that somewhat vague period when she should be grown up, and when, in some way—how she did not know—she would be released from the convent and from Aunt Thérèse, and be at liberty to come and go as she pleased. In the meantime she had almost given up hoping for Monsieur Horace's return. The time when she had last seen him and heard from him already seemed so remote to her childish memory. No one ever spoke to her about him, and he never wrote to her. She did not for a moment think he had forgotten her; she had too much confidence in him for that; but by degrees a notion, vague at first, but gradually becoming a fixed idea destined to have results, established itself in foolish little Madelon's head, that he was waiting till he should hear from her that his fortune was made before he would come back to her. Madelon would get quite unhappy when she thought of this—he must think her so faithless and forgetful, yet how could she help it? That the promise had made as deep an impression upon him as upon her she never doubted for a moment; and was it not most possible, and even probable, that he was expecting to hear of the result, perhaps even in want of this wonderful fortune, on which he must be counting? It was a sad thought,

this, to our Madelon, but gradually it became a confirmed one in her mind.

How long this state of things would have lasted—whether, with the fading of childish impressions, present abiding influences might have taken possession of her, whether, some few years hence, some sudden development of her devotional tendencies might have roused her latent powers of enthusiasm, and turned them in a new direction just at the moment when youthful ardour is most readily kindled, and tender, fervent hearts most easily touched—whether, in such a case, our little Madelon, inspired with new beliefs, would have renounced her old life in the fervour of her acceptance of the new, and, after all, have taken the nun's vows, and been content to allow her native energy and earnestness to find scope in the loftiest aspirations of a convent life—all this can never now be known. Something there was in her character which, under certain conditions, might have developed in such a direction. The time might, indeed, surely would have come, had she remained in the convent, when a sudden need and hunger for sympathy, and perhaps excitement, would have risen in her soul, too keen and imperative to be satisfied with past memories; and when, in the absence of all support and friendship in the outer world, she might have seized on what-

ever she could find in the narrow circle in which she moved, to still that imperious craving. Not in vain, then, might have appeared those old dreams and visions in Florence long ago. Madelon might have learnt to find in them a new and deep significance, an interpretation in accordance with her latest teaching, and through the dim years they might have come back to her—prophetic warnings, as she might have been taught to consider them—linking themselves with present influences, to urge her on to one course. Her father's last command, her own promises, sacred as she held them now, might have availed nothing then, against what she might have been taught to consider a voice from on high, a call of more than earthly authority.

Such, we say, might have been the turn things would have taken with Madelon, had the uninterrupted, monotonous convent life continued to be hers. But long before her mind was prepared for any such influences, early in the third year after her father's death, certain events occurred, which brought this period of her history to an abrupt close.

How, or why the fever broke out—whether it was the result of a damp, unhealthy winter, or through infection brought by one of the school-children, or from any other obvious cause, we need

not inquire here. It first showed itself about the middle of February, and within a fortnight half the nuns had taken it, the school was broken up, and the whole convent turned into a hospital for the sick and dying.

Two of the sisters died within the first week or two; one was very old, so old, indeed, that the fever seemed to be only the decisive touch needed to extinguish the feeble life, that had been uncertainly wavering for months previously; the other was younger, and much beloved. And then came a sense as of some general great calamity, a sort of awe-struck mourning, with which real grief had, perhaps, little to do. The Superior herself had been struck with the fever, and in three days she was dead. Her vigils, her fastings, the wearying abnegations of her stern, hard life had left her little strength for struggling against the disease when it laid hold of her at last, and so she too died in her cell one cold, bleak March morning, with a hushed sisterhood gathered round her death-bed, and gazing on it, as on that of a departing saint. Little beloved, but much revered, Thérèse Linders also had got that she had laboured for, and was now gone to prove the worth of it; that which she had valued most in her narrow world had been awarded her to the full—much honour, but small affection;

much glorification to her memory as to one of surpassing sanctity, few tears of tender or regretful recollection. She had had a strange, loveless life, with a certain pathos in it too, as in the life of every human being, if looked at aright. Not always, one may imagine, had such cold, relentless pietism, such harsh indifference possessed her. She lies there now, still and silent for evermore on earth, a crucifix between her hands, tapers burning at her head and feet, with the hard lines fixed on her cold grey face; and yet she also had been a little, soft, round child, with yearnings too, like other children, for a mother's kisses and a mother's love. "Go away, Adolphe, you are very naughty, and I do not love you; mamma always kisses you, and she never, never kisses me!" This little speech, uttered by our poor saintly Superior when she was but eight years old, may perhaps give the key to much in her after life; and if we cannot, with an admiring sisterhood, henceforth count this unhappy, soured woman in our catalogue of saints, we will at least grant her a place amongst the great company of "might-have-beens," most inscrutable problems in this puzzling life of ours, and so bid her a not unkindly farewell.

Madelon, meanwhile, knew nothing of these things; she had taken the fever also, and while

death was busy in other parts of the convent, she lay unconscious in her little cell, tossing in delirium, or lying in feverish stupor, with Sœur Lucie coming softly in and out. In this desolated overworked household, the child had come to be considered as only another item of trouble, hardly of anxiety; for her life or death just then was felt to be of the very smallest consequence to any one. The one tie that had bound her to the convent had been snapped by her aunt's death; if she lives, think the nuns—if indeed they find time to think of her at all—she is a burthen on our hands; if she dies, well then, one more coffin and another grave. This is perhaps the ebb-tide of Madelon's importance in the world; never before has been, never again will be, we may trust, her existence of so little moment to any human being—that existence which, meanwhile, in spite of all such indifference, in perfect unconsciousness of it indeed, is beginning to assert itself again. For though the Superior has died amidst lamentations, and the places of Sœurs Eulalie and Marguerite will know them no more, our little Madelon, over whom there are none to lament or rejoice, will live.

One afternoon she awoke, as from a long sleep. The low sun was shining into the cell, lighting up the wooden crucifix on the white-washed wall; Sœur Lucie, in her strait coif and long black veil, was

sitting by the bedside reading her book of hours; through the window could be seen a strip of blue sky crossed by some budding tree in the convent garden, little birds were beginning to chirp and twitter amongst the branches. The spring had come in these last days whilst Madelon had been lying there, and in the midst of the glad resurrection of all nature, she too was stirring and awakening to consciousness, and a new life.

CHAPTER VIII.

Madelon overhears a Conversation.

AMIDST the springing flowers, the twitter of pairing birds, and the bursting of green leaves through the brown, downy husks, in the bounteous April weather, Madelon began to recover rapidly. She was nursed with kindness and care, if not exactly with tenderness, by Sœur Lucie; but tenderness our little black sheep had long since learnt not to expect in the convent, and she hardly missed it now. It was in the first days of her convalescence that she heard of the death of her Aunt Thérèse, through some chance remark of one of the Sisters who came into her cell. Had it not been for this, they would have kept it from her longer; but the news scarcely affected her at all. Her aunt had shown her no affection in these last two years that they had lived under the same roof, and, on the few occasions on which Madelon had come in contact with her, the pale, cold face, and severe manner of the nun had inspired her niece with a dread, which only lacked opportunity to become a more active

dislike. She heard the news then with apathy, and was still too languid and weak to think of the loss in reference to herself, or to realise that, so far as she knew, she had now no relation in the world. Nor did such realization come at once, even when she grew stronger; her aunt had counted for so little in her present mode of life, that it did not occur to her that her death might bring any possible change into it; indeed, as we have said, she had ceased to look for any immediate change. Monsieur Horace had brought her to the convent, and Sœur Lucie took care of her there, and so she supposed matters would go on for the present.

If, however, the news of her aunt's death affected her but little, it was quite otherwise with another conversation that she overheard a few days later, and which, indeed, was not meant for her ears either. She had awakened one evening from a long, sound sleep, and was lying quietly in the dusk, dreamily wondering how soon she should make up her mind to arouse herself and take the medicine that she knew awaited her as soon as she should declare herself awake, when Sœur Ursule entered the room. She had come with some message to Sœur Lucie, and when it was delivered, stood chatting for a few minutes by the window where Sœur Lucie sat knitting. She was a gaunt, brisk,

elderly woman, who had been governess in a large school, before an opportune legacy had enabled her to fulfil her dearest wish and enter the convent, where, with fresh zeal and energy, she resumed the duties most congenial to her, as teacher and superintendent of the school. Thoroughly devout and conscientious, and with a kind heart *au fond*, she nevertheless brought with her into her new sphere all the habits and modes of thought acquired during a long struggle with a very hard, secular world—a practical turn of mind, verging on hardness, a dictatorial manner, a certain opinion-activeness, which still showed itself now and then in oddest contrast with the habitual submission demanded of a nun.

“She looks better this evening,” she said now, nodding towards the bed where Madelon lay with her eyes still closed.

“Yes, yes, she is getting on; I shall have her up to-morrow, I hope,” answered Sœur Lucie, with some natural pride in this specimen of successful nursing.

“Ah, well—she could have been better spared though, than some that are gone,” answered the other; “but no doubt it is all for the best. Not but that I am glad that the child is recovering—still we shall certainly find her a great burthen on our hands.”

Poynter, E. Frances

My little lady

Bd.: 1

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